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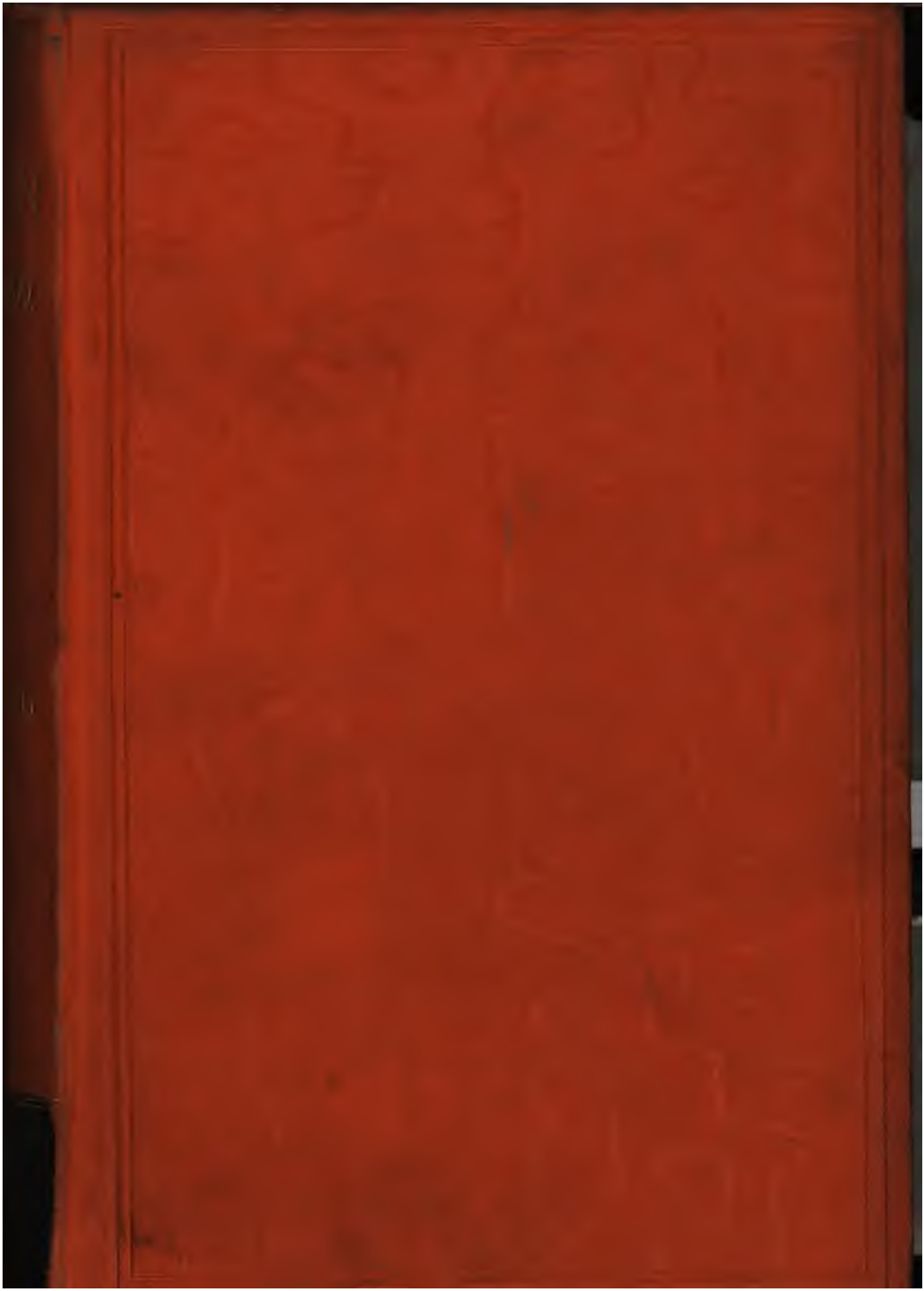
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A GOLDEN SORROW.

VOL. III.

A GOLDEN SORROW.

BY

MRS. CASHEL HOEY,

AUTHOR OF

"A HOUSE OF CARDS," "FALSELY TRUE,"

&c. &c.

"I swear, 'tis better to be lowly born,
And range with humble livers in content,
Than to be perked up in a glistering grief,
And wear a golden sorrow."

King Henry the Eighth.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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A GOLDEN SORROW.

CHAPTER I.

WELCOME HOME.

IT would have been impossible to turn the Firs into a pretty spot by any method short of such a root-and-branch reformation as the pulling down of the old house, and the construction of a new one on a totally different plan and in another aspect. But it was possible to materially improve the ill-favoured, neglected place, and Florence turned all her attention to doing this, during the interval which must elapse before Walter's return. It was a part of

the fidelity of her nature that she never forgot the tastes, the fancies, the lightest expressed wishes of those whom she loved; and the defects, shortcomings, and ugliness of the Firs had been well known to her long before she had ever seen the place, which was now her own property; and she was familiar with all Walter's ideas of what he would have done, had it been his.

One of the most common forms in which such a morose and sullen temper as that with which Reginald Clint had been cursed exhibits itself, is an unreasonable and captious jealousy concerning the possessions of its victim, which resents a suggestion as an aggression, and the least manifestation of interest as a wrong. A constant uneasy suspicion that somebody wanted to interfere with him, a totally uncalled-for spirit of protest that his possessions were his own, possessed him. He would fret and fume

for hours at a careless suggestion from Mr. Martin that the trees were too thick in one of the plantations, or that the pond below the clover-fields would be the better for cleaning. He affected extraordinary secrecy in all his affairs, and changed his *employés* so often that no one ever took any real interest in the place. Miriam and Walter understood him perfectly in these respects, and had early learned to abstain from saying or doing anything to imply a common interest in the Firs, or the assumption of even the most trifling authority within its gates. In the case of Miriam, this indifference was perfectly genuine. "If the house were on fire, and I had got safely out of it, I should not turn my head to see whether it was burned to ashes or not," she had once said to Florence. This was but slight, if any exaggeration; but it was not so with Walter. He had a lasting regard for the

old place, and though he truly believed his father would leave it away from him, he had never arrived at contemplating that contingency with total indifference. Hence Florence's acquaintance with his ideas of what might be done for the improvement of the Firs. The terms of Mr. Clint's bequest to her did not impose any conditions; and, in a very short time after the donor's death, Miriam suggested to Florence that she would do well to get Walter's consent to selling the property on his return. The neighbourhood was a rising one. Whole rows of staring ugly red brick houses, and diminutive villas, with vivid Venetian blinds and top-heavy porticoes, had sprung up between the Firs and Drington Station. The Firs would be valuable building-ground. But Florence did not take kindly to the suggestion. Miriam did not know how much Walter liked the place, and what pride and

pleasure he would take in carrying out all his old plans for its improvement. "Besides," urged Florence, "you must remember that I do not hate rurality as you do."

"No, indeed," Miriam had replied to this; "you are just fit for it. Only I don't think you will ever have your own meat killed on the premises! My dear Rose, all your muttons are pet lambs, and you will let the fowls die of old age! It is a fine thing to be in love," she went on, somewhat irrelevantly. "I do believe you could live happily with Walter in a back kitchen or a snail-shell, if *he* had everything he wanted, and *he* was perfectly comfortable."

"Of course I could," replied Florence, seriously; and then, after a moment, she smiled: "I won't answer for the back kitchen, Miriam; I'm afraid I should be a nuisance there; I'm horribly afraid of beetles."

"I don't believe you're afraid of anything, except Walter's being delayed, or something happening to him. There, the colour has gone from your face in a moment! Ah! well, that is the only thing *I* fear either, so that we are alike there. And you really are going to begin your renovations as soon as you get rid of us—a precious incubus we are to you!"

Florence protested earnestly against this. Miriam she dearly loved, and Mr. St. Quentin had been decently civil to her. She had hoped they would remain until Walter's return. Surely Miriam must feel that the house and all in it was as much hers as it had ever been.

"An unlucky comparison!" said Miriam, with an uneasy laugh. "If I had ever felt as much at home at the Firs as I feel now, I should not have been in such a hurry to escape from it. You must not be deceived

by Mr. St. Quentin's civility, my dear: it does not mean much of anything, probably, but what it does *not* mean is that I am to have the indulgence of being with my brother. He cannot endure the mention of him; if he finds out I have heard from him, he sulks for days together. He is more jealous of him than he is of you. The fact is, notwithstanding all my praiseworthy and persevering efforts to mislead him, I believe he has *not* succeeded in persuading himself that I have a lover, therefore his jealousy is obliged to feed itself on my one real and acknowledged affection; and the aliment is decidedly unwholesome. I can't altogether blame him for being rather savage, though he did bring it on himself, for, of course, if I have not succeeded in persuading him that there is something real which I am hiding from him, he *must* know I have been deluding and laughing at him."

"Miriam, Miriam, a dangerous game!"

"Florence, Florence, don't preach! If"—here Miriam's face changed and darkened—"if you could know how degrading and detestable a lot mine is, you would wonder I could play at any game less serious or final than drowning myself! As for my seeing Walter, I don't expect it, unless he comes to me, undeterred by Mr. St. Quentin's exquisite facility for making people uncomfortable. No, no; depend upon it, I shall be permitted to come here only as a bribe for future good behaviour. Well, it cannot last for ever, that's one comfort—not but it may last my time."

Then she left Florence, and did not afterwards renew the conversation. She was right, as has been seen, in her surmise. Mr. St. Quentin took her away, and Florence was left, with even increased misgivings about his sister's future, to her engrossing

and delightful preparations for Walter's return.

The lawn was transformed after a fashion which its late proprietor would have regarded as wasteful to the last degree. A deep sunken fence, faced with stone, and surmounted by a handsome railing, over which numerous plants were in time to climb and twist, would henceforth keep the cattle at a distance, rendering them picturesque but not intrusive; and the ground thus subtracted from the purposes of severe utility was turned into just such a flower-garden as Florence and Walter used to sketch, Alnaschar-like, in their cottage in George Lane. Light paper and hangings, and some pretty new furniture, did wonders for the gloomy sitting-rooms; and no one would have recognised the study, a room which had, as Florence knew, more unpleasant associations for Walter than any other in the house.

When the changes were all made, Florence still had plenty of time on her hands to think of the strangeness of her position, and, having thought it out, to grow used to it. Acting on the concurrent advice of Miriam and Mrs. Cooke, she had dismissed all the servants, and engaged others. They had been liberally treated, but of course they were discontented, and equally of course they were censorious. Susan was impertinent also, and took occasion to mention pretty widely in the neighbourhood that there was more in all that affair at the Firs than people understood, or thought for. Only Mrs. Ritchie was equal to the occasion —*she* resigned! It would be a false position, she observed, for Mrs. Walter Clint and for herself, and she had, all her life, avoided false positions. So she departed from the Firs; and whether Robert attached himself to her fortunes, as he had given her

every reason to believe he would do, or whether he kept his often plighted troth to Susan, this chronicle does not record.

Florence found ardently zealous supporters in the small world of Drington and its environs. Probably it would never have occurred to her to care or inquire what people of whom she knew nothing, thought of the strange events in which she was so deeply concerned. She knew little of the world, and was so far from being self-engrossed that she would not have regarded herself as a subject for anybody's curiosity, had not Mrs. Cooke enlightened her. That excellent woman, who was very much distressed by the remembrance of her own unintentional mistake, made *amende honorable* in the handsomest and frankest manner to Florence, and became her very sincere and efficient friend. Mrs. Cooke had not only the legitimate *prestige* of her position, but

she was personally popular and influential, and when she was resorted to, by the ladies of her acquaintance, in the agonies of their curiosity amid the conflicting rumours afloat in the neighbourhood, she related the true story with much pathetic effect, and never failed to declare her belief that the neighbourhood had gained a "decided acquisition" in Mrs. Walter Clint.

"You can easily imagine the difference it makes to Mr. Cooke and myself to have such a charming neighbour at the Firs," she would say to each questioner, and then hint at the pleasure it would give her to invite the individual in question to meet Mrs. Clint at dinner at the Rectory, when she should be going out again. In a short time, people who had never before been inside the gates of the Firs were asking Mrs. Cooke how soon they might venture to call on Florence; and long before Walter's return his pretty,

gentle wife had become a general favourite. The committee of the Ladies' Book-Club, a most exclusive institution, under the rigid censorship of a literary lady—who had written "quite an immense deal," but had not appeared in print, because her family considered that sort of thing "low"—had invited her to become a member. The Drington Dorcas meetings were brightened by her sweet face, and aided by her busy fingers. Mr. Martin was her sworn ally; and Mr. Standish confessed to that gentleman—who had never liked him, and henceforth, rather unreasonably, disliked him more than ever—that he had believed the scandal about her until the day of the reading of the will, and that then he was ashamed of himself.

"And so you ought to be," was Mr. Martin's brief comment.

"You must recollect Clint's will was a very extraordinary one, and I had never

seen her before it was made, and only once afterwards for a few minutes."

"*Half* a minute ought to have been enough to make you ashamed *then* of such a belief," said Mr. Martin, irascibly. Whereupon Mr. Standish called to mind the coarse sarcasm which Mr. St. Quentin had uttered in his wrath, with reference to Mr. Martin's bachelor condition, and murmured to himself: "I should not wonder if the old nabob were right, and Martin were spoons on her too."

It was on a beautiful day in early Autumn that Walter Clint returned to the home from which he had been so unjustly banished, to find the utmost desire of his heart fulfilled. He had reached Liverpool on the previous evening, telegraphed his arrival to Florence, and started by the earliest train in the morning. A serene stillness was over the face of the earth and the calm blue sky. The trees

—with their many-tinted foliage, sad when looked at singly, but gorgeous in their grand masses, overspread with countless shades of brown, and russet, and gold—were quite motionless, and the few leaves which fell ever and anon dropped silently on the grass. Sound travelled far in the deep stillness of the weather, and Florence, leaning out of an open window at the top of the house, could hear the monotonous rattle of the train many miles away. The sun was declining, the delicious scents of evening were blending with the air. As Florence leaned out, breathless, and feeling, now that he was really coming, that it could not be, that it was all a dream, and yet, at the same time, that nothing else could be, that this was the one truth, she heard the grating of wheels, and saw the dog-cart she had ordered to be sent for Walter driven rapidly down the avenue. She could not stand another mo-

ment. On her knees by the window-sill she watched now, and heard the two sounds—the monotonous rattle of the train as it neared Drington Station, and the rapid whirl of the wheels of her own carriage on the road. Presently both ceased.

She had put off her heavy mourning for that day, and wore a white dress with black ribbons. Her fair brown hair was curled upon her neck, as Walter had liked to see it, as she had not had the heart to wear it during his long absence. Good God! his long absence!—how long, how terrible it had been! She only realized it now—now, when it was all but over. How had she ever lived through it? It seemed utterly impossible that she could have endured it. All the pangs of this dreadful time, this cruel waste of their brief lives, this irreparably lost treasure, seemed to be mingled with the assurance and the expectation of that hour.

She had planned this event, this meeting, a thousand times over, and now not one incident would resemble her fancied sketch of it. She was to have looked at herself in the glass, and finally touched up her dress before he came, and run down to meet him at the door, when she should hear the dog-cart return. But the sound of wheels is on the road now, and Florence cannot stir. She cannot think of what her dress is, or how she looks in it, or whether everything is right downstairs. An extraordinary tremor and weakness have hold of her; she shrinks from the intensity of her own joy; the whole of the past is in these moments, and yet there is inextricable confusion of thought in them too. The sound of the dog-cart is in the avenue, but Florence cannot stir. All the doors are open below, and, ringing clear through the surging and beating in her ears, she hears Walter's voice. "Where is she?"

he says, and some one answers; and then swift footsteps flee up the stairs, and cross the room, and Walter holds her in his arms!

* * * * * *

"Oh, Walter; to think of your having had that frightful fever, and my never knowing anything about it! To think that you might have died, at the very time I was preparing for your coming home! How awful! how awful!"

"My darling, don't cry so. You are crying as if it had all happened, whereas none of it happened. I am quite well, and with you, and everything is a thousand times happier and better than we ever could have hoped for."

"I know, I know, and I *am* thankful; I *am* happy, but you must let me cry a little, until I can get over it, Walter. I seem to see it all, and live through it, even now, and the terror of a great escape from a fearful danger is upon me."

"*It was* a bad fever," said Walter, trying to check her very unusual vehemence of emotion by speaking carelessly; "but I am none the worse for it, though, of course, I am changed. But then, you must remember, long journeys and hard work and time tell on one, little Flo; and if I am thin and brown, and my hair is grizzled, there are reasons besides the fever. I assure you I am perfectly well; I wish I could say as much for Daly, poor fellow! He was hit hard, in earnest."

"He said in the letter he wrote for you —how little I dreamed there was any cause for your employing him, beyond the hurt hand you pleaded!—that he had been ill. Was it a fever like yours?"

"A much worse one it must have been, though it did not look so at the time, and he was not ill nearly so long. But"—here Walter's face grew puzzled and downcast—

"he has never recovered it, in one serious respect. His mind has never been clear since."

"Walter! Can it be possible? Oh, poor fellow!"

"It is very sad. But do not mention it to anyone; it may be all right by the time he comes home; and even now nobody but myself could tell that he has a fixed delusion in his mind, for he is perfectly rational in every other respect, and it is only to me he would mention the absurd notion he has conceived."

"What is it, Walter? May I know?"

"You shall know as much as I do, my darling," replied Walter, in an embarrassed, uneasy tone; "and then let us drop the subject, for I don't like it, as you may suppose. Lawrence fancies that he and I dug up a big nugget at our claim, and that I buried it somewhere while he was ill. He

bothered me with innumerable questions when I was recovering from the fever, and, though I persisted in avoiding any reference to it, I could see his mind was quite full of the craze up to the time we parted. Of course, it made me very unhappy."

"Then there was no foundation at all for such a notion?"

"Not the slightest."

"Walter," said Florence, after a pause, "is this—his mind being quite clear on every other point—insanity?"

"I don't know," answered Walter hastily; "it is certainly a craze, but I don't think it amounts to *that.*"

"Thank God! I must always love Lawrence, for your sake and for his own, and regard him as my dearest friend, whatever befalls—but—you never found out what a coward I am?"

"No indeed, little Flo, I never did; and

considering the scenes you have gone through here, I should think no one else ever did."

"Ah, but they might have done so. I am dreadfully afraid of any one whose mind is in the least disordered. It is weak and wrong, I know, and I wish I could get over it, but my flesh creeps, and my heart quails at the mere thought of being with a mad person."

"Don't talk, don't think of Daly as *mad*," said Walter; "he will be all right when he comes home. Let's talk no more about it." He rose, sighed, and walked about the room. Florence followed him with her eyes. His face was sad and puzzled.

"His happiness is not perfect," she thought. "This is a great grief to him. What had I better do? Not ask him questions about their life abroad, which would direct his mind to this misfortune. And yet

I did so long to know every particular. However, that must be given up."

It was never very difficult for Florence to resolve on giving up her own wishes on any subject. She mentally made the sacrifice, and adhered to it. Walter was now standing beside the glass-door of the study, which opened no longer upon a narrow rough gravelled pathway, but upon the smooth shaven green grass-plot of the new flower-garden. His profile was turned towards her, and as she looked at him she realised, for the first time, how much he was altered. Climate, hard work, and illness had indeed been busy with him. The brightness of youth had gone from his face, and there was no startling contrast between the thin features and embrowned complexion and the prematurely gray hair. Florence's heart overflowed with thankfulness as she gazed at him. She was convinced that

she must indeed have been very near losing him. Presently, he said, with a shake of his head, as if discarding a painful impression: "What was your last news of Miriam."

"I heard from her two days ago. There was nothing particular in her letter. She seems to be enjoying herself in her own way."

"I don't understand her or her way, I confess. I cannot reconcile myself to that marriage of hers; and—I'll tell you what, Flo, I shouldn't wonder if the old man left her nothing, or next to it; or if he does leave her his money, that he hampers it with some condition to destroy its value."

"Oh, Walter, do you think he would be so wicked?"

"Yes, I do; and I'm not quite sure it would be so very wicked if he did, either; at least, of course it would be spiteful, but

not so entirely unjust. You must acknowledge Miriam tries him a good deal; and as she undeniably married him for his money, as there never was a plainer case of bargain, I think she might keep her part of it a little more liberally."

"He worries and degrades her by his senseless jealousy."

"No doubt; but who suffers by it most?"

"He does; I suppose."

"Of course he does. How happy we might all have been, as things have turned out, if Miriam had not made this great blunder! However, that is another unpleasant subject; and I will neither talk nor think of it. I will think," he continued, seating himself beside her, and encircling her with his arms, "only of the wonderful fortune which gave a fellow like me such a wife as my little Flo."

They were very happy.

CHAPTER II.

THE LIE CIRCUMSTANTIAL.

"NOTHING is so likely as the Improbable, and therefore I ought not to be surprised," said Lawrence Daly, as he shook Deering's hand with a cordiality which owed its origin mainly to the sense of strangeness in a strange place being relieved by the sight of a face, known, if not familiar. "But I *am;* for you are the very man I wanted to see, and have been inquiring after, ever since we reached New York."

"Indeed!" said Deering, with a sharp glance at the speaker. "Your inquiries

were not successful, I should think, for there's not a more thoroughly 'unknown' man in the Empire City. Why did you want to see me? I caught sight of you as you came off the gangway, but could not make my way to you sooner. How are you now? All right again? You look as if the voyage had picked you up considerably."

"Completely. I'm all right again."

"And your chum, Clint?"

"He is all right too, and is off to England. Did you not see him on the deck, at the top of the gangway?"

"No; you were half-way down when I recognised you. And so he's gone home, is he? You've done well then, I presume. No offence in asking; remember, I'm an Englishman, and therefore capable of conceiving that there may be."

"None whatever. We have not, as a

fact, done remarkably well, and certainly could not have struck work so soon, but for a series of strange circumstances. Which way are you going?"

It appeared that Deering was going nowhere in particular, and so they walked back together, in the direction of Tremont House, Broadway, where Daly and Walter had been boarding since their arrival in New York.

"No," continued Daly, "we were very moderately prosperous, except in one respect; and that exception forms a strange story, even in this land of the wonderful, in nature and adventure. One bit of good luck came to us just before I took the fever, only to be lost again. Do you remember Clint's going to fetch you that time?"

"Of course, I do; and the Irish fellow who was about your claim, the man with a maimed hand. He was murdered after-

wards. I saw an account of it in the papers."

"Yes, poor fellow, he was. That was the worst of all that befell us. His death was indirectly caused by our piece of transitory good luck."

"Indeed! How was that?"

Lawrence Daly began to tell him their story. Deering listened in profound silence, not interrupting him by either a question or an exclamation, but glancing at him from time to time from under his bushy red eyebrows, with close, curious, and suspicious scrutiny.

"The murdered man knew all about the finding of this nugget?" he asked, at length, when Daly had reached the episode of Spoiled Five's death and Walter's delirium.

"I don't know; I can't tell. He said one thing which seemed like it, but I have no certain knowledge. It was just before my own illness."

"But Clint must know. The man was somewhere about your hut, the day I was there last; and, by-the-by, the shock of the murder no doubt intensified Clint's fever, and acted directly on the brain, but it did not cause it. You may take *my* word for that."

"Take *your* word! Why?"

"Because the seeds of fever were in him that day. Because I knew he was ill, when he walked out of the hut with me. Because I distinctly remember thinking, when I bade him good-bye at the bluff, that I shouldn't wonder if he was in for the fever."

"You might have told him so, and warned him; or turned back, and contrived to let me know, if such was really your impression."

"What would have been the good?" said Deering, carelessly. "It had to come, and I could not have waited to pull him through

it. It all came right in the end, it seems."

"No; it didn't. Wait awhile, and you will see that in other respects than the murder of poor Spoiled Five, it came very wrong in the end—so wrong that I am still on this side of the world, with my fortune to make, and the best I can to do with Clint's share of the little we did make; for the nugget is gone, hopelessly gone, unless *you* can help me to recover it."

"I!" exclaimed Deering, standing quite still in his astonishment, and looking at Daly, as if in doubt whether his words were meant for an affront. "What the devil do you mean? What do I know about your nugget?"

"Nothing—and yet you must give me the clue to it, if I am ever to recover it. You remember the day you came to tell us you were going, and took some letters for Clint?"

"Yes, yes; I remember perfectly; but what——"

The two men had been standing still, but people began to hustle them, and Daly, taking Deering's arm, walked on.

"Clint had just returned then from hiding the nugget, and he had made an accurate memorandum of the spot in his pocket-book. Have you any recollection of his taking out the book in your presence?"

Deering perceptibly started. There was no doubt about it; the arm which Daly was holding revealed the sudden tremor of the man's nerves. But he answered, slowly and unmoved:

"Yes, I recollect. What then?"

"You were going to dress a cut in his hand—a cut received in hiding the nugget—and you used a green leather instrument-case for the purpose."

"Which I must have lost on that occa-

sion, for I never could find it afterwards."

"You left it in the hut. And now comes the strangest part of my story. Clint's mind became affected in the fever, and when he recovered, he had entirely lost all recollection of the finding of the nugget, of his having concealed it, and, in short, everything about it. I was not much distressed by this at first, except for his own sake, for I remembered that the pocket-book would guide me to the place, and when I could *show* him the gold, he would be all right again. But I looked for Clint's pocket-book; it was not in the locker, and I found instead of it—this."

He took from a deep breast-pocket the small green leather instrument-case, and again stood still for a moment. Deering did not start now; he took the case from Daly's hand, and turned it over carelessly.

"I knew what was coming," he said. "I

always had an idea I had dropped this in the hut, and picked up the old empty pocket-book I found, days afterwards, in my pocket, by mistake."

"Just so. You have it still?" asked Daly, eagerly.

"No, indeed; I have not. There seems to be quite a fate over the thing. I lost it on board ship; it fell out of my pocket one day when I was leaning over the side, watching some dolphins in a gale, and I very nearly went over with it.—But don't look so glum, man; it was no loss to either you or me, for there was nothing in it."

"Nothing in it! Are you sure?"

"Cock-sure. I remember Clint's taking the letters of which I took charge out of it. A paper of needles and some pack-thread were its sole contents, when I looked into it, next, at Placer-Ville."

"Was there no sketch, no memorandum?"

"Nothing of the sort. Not a scrap of paper of any description. If there had been, of course I should have sent it back. I should have known then, *for certain*, where I had picked up the pocket-book, and what had become of my instrument-case. Of course I guessed, but neither was worth the trouble of an exchange."

"Very extraordinary!" said Daly. "Clint gave me an account of his hiding the nugget, as clearly as I am speaking to you now, and most emphatically told me he had entered the particulars, with every needful indication, in that unlucky book."

"Precisely so. And you are bewildered at finding that he had done nothing of the kind!—bewildered, though you have just told me Clint's mind became disordered in the fever, *which was on him at that very time*, and that he has lost every trace of memory of the whole transaction! But if you think,

you will cease to be bewildered. There is, in reality, nothing very surprising in the matter; the whole thing was a delusion of Clint's. There's the explanation in a word."

"How could that be? I found the nugget. It was in my possession, in my own keeping, for days before I fell ill; and if Clint did not hide it—if the whole story of the concealment, and the memorandum in the book, be a delusion, what had become of the gold? It was gone; there is no more mistake about *that* than there is about our having found it. How can you square that fact with your theory?"

"Very easily, my dear fellow, though I am sorry to say it, for your sake. I explain the case thus—partly from the circumstances you have just related to me, and partly from my own observation of Clint on the day I saw him last, which was the day of the supposed concealment of the nugget, and *imme-*

diately after that concealment. He was ill then; I saw it—saw it within a few minutes after we left the house together—saw it in his walk and in his eye—heard it in his voice, and almost told him so, if I remember rightly, certainly hinted to him that he would do well to take care of himself. The delirium was coming on then."

"But three or four days elapsed between that and the murder?"

"No matter. There is nothing more subtle, more baffling, more impossible to account for, than the origin and progress of these fevers. I have known cases of their being dormant in the system for weeks, ay, even in these climates; there would be nothing surprising in that in England. You had both been anxious to get your gold down to Placer-Ville; Clint had had mysterious warnings from the lame man—a vagabond, no doubt, with a mental reserva-

tion in favour of not being a party to robbing you, if he could avoid it "——

"No, no," interrupted Daly; "you must work out your theory without *that* element. You did not know Spoiled Five; *I* did—he was no vagabond."

"Very well, then, he wasn't—as you please. At least, it is quite plain he knew what people who were vagabonds were doing, or intended to do. He put Clint on his guard; and Clint's brain, already in the gripe of the fever, manufactured a whole sequence of delusions out of the warning. Depend upon it, he no more buried the nugget than you did. What can be more conclusive on that point than the fact that the memorandum he told you such a consistent story about had no existence? If a portion of his story be proved false, there is every reasonable presumption that in the case of *such* a story none of it is true. His

oblivion of the romance concocted in his sick brain is a proof that he has regained his senses, not that they remain incomplete."

Daly shook his head with obstinate incredulity. "It won't do," he said; "your theory won't do. Remember, it is not only the hiding of the nugget, and all the circumstances of the murder, all the occurrences which preceded, accompanied, and followed the shock he received, which he has forgotten; but the finding of the nugget, the very existence of it, all the circumstances jointly and equally known to us both. To be right, you must account for that."

"I think I can account for it," returned Deering. "The safety of the nugget was the chief anxiety, the last strong, engrossing impression on his mind, an impression sufficiently strong to create the delusion. I am satisfied the whole story he told you was. Reaction, in such a case as this, would be

decisive and complete. Oblivion would settle down over the whole of the matter, if it invaded any portion of it. Perhaps your medical studies have not embraced these subtle subjects? Perhaps you have not had any extensive experience of mental disease or phenomena?"

This suggestion told immensely. There was nothing more opposed to Daly's disposition or practice than pretence of any kind. The assumption of knowledge which he did not possess would have appeared to him simply fraudulent as well as impudent. To so keen an observer as Deering, a man accustomed to every kind of fraudulent assumption, from base coin to spurious reputation, the transparent frankness and gentlemanly quiet of his manner had probably revealed this.

"You are right so far," Daly answered. "I have never studied those branches of

medical science, and am quite ignorant on the subject."

"Whereas it is a speciality of mine, if I may lay claim to anything so distinguished as a speciality. I have no doubt whatever that I have made a correct guess in this case. Deuced hard on you, I must say, to have had the gold stolen."

"But how could it have been stolen? The dust was all right. The thieves and murderers had not got in."

"How do you know? You tell me you heard a noise, and rose and went out in the direction of it, and found Clint lying insensible over the murdered man's body. You can only conclude that he too had been roused by a noise. He can give you no information; it is all a blank to him. Don't you think it very likely it was the thief, or thieves, who awoke him; and that it was in

pursuit of them, or him, Clint staggered to the door, and fell?"

"I never did think of the case in this light before," said Daly. "As it never occurred to me to doubt Clint's story about the nugget, I never had an idea that any robbery had really been committed. But, as you put it, I must say it looks exceedingly probable."

"Does any other solution, considering the memorandum turns out to be a myth, look *at all* probable?" asked Deering. "After all, that is the way to take a thing of this kind. *It must be* explicable, because it has indisputably happened; and the only explanation *I* can discern, consistent with facts, is the one I have just offered. I must say again, it is deuced hard upon you. Clint need not care so much: in the first place, he knows nothing about it; and in the second, if his memory comes back to him on

the point of the finding of the nugget, he need not fret, if he has come into the good thing you say by his father's death."

"I almost hope his memory may always remain under *that* cloud, unless, indeed, it should presage any further mental disorder." There was a question in his tone, if not in his words, and Deering answered it carelessly, lightly, after a fashion from which the other shrank.

"Oh, never fear; he'll do well enough. A man is none the worse with a hiatus in his brain, if he has a good income, nothing to do, and a wife who believes in him. A country squire can get on as well cracked as whole, I should say."

Daly made no immediate reply; but after they had walked on a little further, he said:

"If Clint had not been hiding the nugget, how do you account for the cut in his wrist that morning?"

"I don't account for it. What occasion is there for accounting for it? It would be a mere waste of ingenuity, like many of the things one troubles one's head about. You were both in the habit of doing rough and dirty work every day of your lives. How often have you had cut hands, and smears of blood on your sleeves?"

"Often, indeed."

"I should think so. That moving incident need not disturb our conclusions."

Daly then told Deering that he had consulted Dr. Drewitt, and what that gentleman's opinion of Walter Clint's case was. "If you are right," he continued—"and there is a growing conviction in my mind that you are right—I have unconsciously misstated the case. It is a much simpler one, as you put it. It is the cessation of a delusion, and not the existence of one. Dr. Drewitt seemed very much interested about it, and

pressed me, as if he really meant it, to communicate with him if there was anything to tell. I think I ought to write to him, place the hypothesis you have just stated before him, and point out that I may have unconsciously misled him."

"No, no; don't do that," said Deering, with a look at his companion which was a mingling of a sneer and a scowl. "His interest was merely professional manner, depend upon it. I know old Drewitt—not a bad old fellow, but a regular charlatan: would persuade you your headache was an intimate grief to him, and dissect his best friend with perfect composure. Don't gratify him; he has not a particle of delicacy; you would probably find the correspondence published in a puffing paper or some medical gazette before you were out of the country, with names and dates complete."

Considering that Deering knew nothing

whatever of Dr. Drewitt but his name, he had drawn rather audaciously on his fancy in this sketch, which was remarkable for its entire and absolute unlikeness to that very estimable man. But Deering had all his wits about him at all times; and, following up the train of certain considerations which had been occupying his mind during the preceding conversation, very rapidly came the reflection that it was advisable this romantic story of a buried nugget and a lost memory should be known to as few people and as little discussed as possible. He was rather anxious for Daly's reply, but when it came it satisfied him.

"Dr. Drewitt impressed me much more favourably, I must say; but as you know him, I suppose I was mistaken. The publicity of everything in this country would, perhaps, emancipate him from the restraints a man in a similar position at home would

feel imposed on him. I will not communicate with him until I get home, at all events. Then, if there is any decided change in Clint, confirmatory of his opinion, I must write to him, according to my promise."

"When do you think of going back to England?"

"I can't say," answered Daly, with a disconcerted, nervous sort of laugh. "It seems odd that the decision of that question should ever have rested with a man so nearly a stranger to me as yourself; and yet it did. The clearest and most decided idea I had in remaining in New York was the hope of finding you, and of recovering the pocket-book. If you had not lost it, we might have done something in the speculative line here, and had the nugget to fall back upon, for I need hardly say I should have expected you to accept an acknowledgment at my hands of so great and important

an obligation. But that is all over now."

He lifted his hat, and pushed his thick dark hair off his brow, then ran his fingers through his beard, and threw back his broad shoulders with a gesture familiar to him when he regarded a matter as decided and done with.

By this time they had reached Tremont House. Daly asked Deering to dine with him, but he was not sorry that his invitation was declined. They parted, having made an engagement to meet on the following day; and Daly went into the house, and up to his room, feeling that the events of the day had been rather too much for him. He would need time and solitude to think them out clearly.

Deering, too, sought his much humbler quarters, where he had, however, the facilities he required for leading the kind of life he led of choice. He was hampered by no

"respectabilities," checked by no surveillance of decorum or refinement. And among his reflections was this one—whether, if it should prove that there was anything to be made out of Daly—anything, he meant, in the present, apart from the prospective gain, which, with all the means and plans for its acquisition, was already assuming definite shape in his imagination—he would not do well to change his quarters. Daly evidently knew very little of New York, but he was in a fair way of learning. Deering had had an instinctive consciousness that Walter Clint had suspected and distrusted him, but that consciousness had not included Daly, who was much the cleverer man of the two. But Deering knew the difference between the perceptive powers of a man in illness and a man in health, and gave it its full weight. "A man rarely dislikes his doctor, if he cures him," he thought; and

certainly there had been no dislike of him in Daly's manner that day.

"I'll see if I can't make him go away just when it suits me he should do so—no sooner; and no later," Deering said to himself, as he entered a room at once dingy and flashy, whose artistic and literary contents would have furnished the least acute observer with clear indications of his character and pursuits.

He carried a chair across the room, placed it in front of a tall, gaunt press, and standing on it, contrived, with some trouble, to pull down a shabby old valise, which had evidently seen much service, and had been pushed well out of sight against the wall at the top of the press. He flung it on the floor, and turned it over with his foot, to rid it of a portion of the encumbering dust; then placed it on a table, and turned out its motley, valueless contents, until he found the

object of his search. He came upon it in a few minutes; and sweeping the valise and all the scattered rubbish down upon the floor, he lighted a gas jet over the stove, locked the door, and set himself to long, serious study of certain closely-written memoranda and roughly-drawn lines, dotted with figures, which occupied two pages of a green leather pocket-book. After his study had lasted some time, he smiled slowly, and muttered—

"Yes, that will do; perfectly clear and easy, with my recollection of the place. If that fellow hadn't let out the value of this before he asked me for it, he might have done me out of it easily." Then he turned to the written paper again, with the reflection: "There's no such d—d fool as your perfect gentleman."

CHAPTER III.

INFORMATION REQUIRED.

THE loneliness of a great swarming city, where the faces are strange, and one is excluded from the interests which engross every human being one meets; where one might drop out of the concourse, and not be missed for one instant by any living soul, fell heavily on Lawrence Daly. During their short sojourn together in New York, Walter and he had been so much occupied with one another, the imminence of separation after their long and close companionship had never been absent from their thoughts, and they had hardly observed the

surrounding scene. But Walter was gone now, and Daly, though not an ungracious, unsociable man, felt very thoroughly alone. He knew the feeling was to some extent voluntary, that when he should really rouse himself to look into his affairs, and take any steps in the direction of business, he should find no lack or difficulty of association; but just yet he did not feel disposed to make the effort. Very seldom in his life before had Lawrence Daly deliberately given way to the indulgence of a weakness, but he did so now, to the indulgence of the weakness of discontent.

He did not envy Walter his lot, in the sense of feeling anything but joyful sympathy with his happiness, and pleasure in his good fortune; but he did feel a great longing for a little of similar sunshine in his own life. The tide had set against him, somehow, just when it turned for Walter, and he mur-

mured against this. There was nowhere in the world a home where he would be welcomed, *in right of himself;* there was not a woman in the world the pulses of whose heart could be stirred by his step, his voice, his smile. Lawrence Daly had not frittered away his feelings in flirtation, and a "grand passion," with its stormy delight and pangs, had never crossed his life. He had never been well enough off in the past to contemplate the possibility of marriage; and this last failure made him think he had better dismiss the idea permanently for the future. It did not much matter, in the abstract form, in which only Daly thought of marriage, but, he thought, rather bitterly, it might have mattered very much. If, instead of the blank life, whose strongest interest was his interest for Walter Clint, his life had been blest with the love of a woman—a gentle, sweet woman like Flo-

rence, or a handsome, brave, impetuous, somewhat ungovernable woman like that golden-eyed Miriam, of whom her brother was so proud and fond—why, then, he would have put this disappointment right away out of sight, and gone to work, to win a home and a provision for her. But, after all, what did it matter to him? It was this very feeling that it did *not* matter which made it hard to bear. Evidently, Lawrence was out of sorts.

Under these circumstances, Deering got the chance of forming a sort of intimacy with him, which, under any other, he would not have succeeded in establishing. He was linked, in a slight but still important manner, with the old life, from which Daly had had no conception it would be so painful to break away; and he was a wanderer, like himself, though, unlike him, no stranger to the ways of New York. They met again

and again, and Deering gave Daly some by no means ill-considered or insincere advice concerning the investment of the comparatively small sums at his disposal, on his account and Walter's, with a view to the speediest returns consistent with safety. The intermittent fever of speculation was in one of its hot fits just then in the Empire City, and the only difficulty was that of selecting among the innumerable schemes, of hitherto unequalled brilliancy and extent, by which everybody was to make a fortune. Daly dabbled in one or two of the most reasonable of these, and did well. He was beginning to like the place, to make friends, to get over the desolation and the desultoriness which had at first beset him. He had heard of Walter's arrival, and of the flourishing state of things in general at the Firs, and, in answer to a cautiously written letter, addressed to Florence, and in which he had

requested an answer from her own hand, he had received a report of Walter's health which satisfied him that he was well, but that no re-awakening of the memory on the subject on which it had so suddenly and mysteriously sunk into slumber had taken place.

"I have only two faults to find with Walter," Florence wrote, near the end of a pleasant letter, which brought her pretty face and sweet voice back to Lawrence's remembrance with tantalising freshness: "one is that he looks so much older than his years—the other is that he is growing very lazy."

"The fever accounts for the one, and ease and prosperity excuse the other," thought Lawrence. "I wonder how the golden-eyed Miriam gets on." Presently there was a reference to her in Florence's letter:

"We are still always expecting Mr. and

Mrs. St. Quentin, and they are still always not coming. He has been ill lately, Walter bids me tell you, with gout, and takes the most violent remedies in order to be able to go out into company. He goes about to all sorts of places with Miriam. I hope they will come to England soon, but I have given up counting upon it. Walter says he has only one thing besides to wish for—that your time was up, and you were safely home at the Firs. And, indeed, dear Mr. Daly, so do I heartily wish this also."

"A good, kind, genuine, womanly letter," said Lawrence to himself, as he folded it up. "It makes a fellow feel less lonely and lost to get such a letter as this. Walter means me to understand that he is confirmed in his notions of the St. Quentin *ménage*, of course. The old gentleman stifles his gout in the interests of his jealousy, no doubt."

Daly had completely adopted Deering's

theory of the occurrences at the gold-diggings, and had come to regard the loss of the nugget with composure, as he might have regarded any ordinary loss by robbery. As time went on, it did occur to him sometimes to think it strange that he knew so little of Deering, apart from their joint transactions; how reserved and taciturn the man was in everything which related to his past life, his family relations, or his future prospects; whereas he had been tolerably expansive in his own communications with Deering. He remembered that Walter Clint had made a remark of the same kind to him one day, and had accompanied it with an expression of dislike to Deering. As for Mr. Deering himself, he found the acquaintance with Daly, to which he had contrived to give the appearance of intimacy, both useful and pleasant, and it was quite remarkable with what curiosity and interest he collected from

Daly's conversation every detail which could serve in the construction of the history of his past career. Daly was so much the opposite of an egotistical man, that the collection of these details was not an easy matter; indeed, it demanded considerable tact, in which Deering sometimes broke down, so that, if Lawrence had not been as little suspicious as he was egotistical, it must have struck him that his friend was strongly actuated by curiosity. But the two qualities combined acted in the interests of Deering's purpose. Daly was not put on his guard by any overweening notion of his own importance, and he never suspected Deering of any ulterior object. Thus it came to pass that, in process of time, Deering had arrived at a knowledge of all the events in Daly's history sufficiently accurate and minute to have served for the compilation of one of those wonderful *dossiers*, which are the terror of

French delinquents, and the objects of envy and admiration to French romance-writers.

"You'll excuse my saying so," he remarked to Daly one evening, when they were smoking sociably together on a certain well-known balcony, "but I think you acted rather rashly in respect to the nabob! You cut the painter there too abruptly and too completely. If you had then had a little more knowledge of the world, I fancy you would have given him more time, wouldn't you?"

"What for? To keep a promise to a dead woman which he had persistently broken while she lived? Where would have been the sense of that? I should have gained nothing by it, and lost my own self-respect. No, no; notwithstanding the loss of the nugget, I am better off now than I should have been, loafing about, and waiting for the favours of such an uncommonly

treacherous and shifty old providence as Mr. Clibborn."

"I think I understood you, that, in addition to his having married your mother's sister, he is a relative of your own?" There was an unaccountable eagerness in Deering's face as he asked this question, to which Daly replied carelessly:

"He is a distant relative, but the nearest I have; and I am the nearest he has, I believe."

Then they dropped the subject.

About this time Mr. Deering had an unusual amount of correspondence on hand. Ordinarily, he neither wrote nor received letters which implied anything beyond the business he was engaged in, and the rather low pleasures with which he diversified it. But he had taken to looking out for mail-days of late, and it might have been observed that he was pre-occupied at such

times, and additionally attentive to Daly and watchful of him.

Lawrence was not an eager reader of newspapers. A very superficial perusal of the news from Europe sufficed for him, and, if the Atlantic cable had existed in those days, he would probably have dispensed with journalistic literature altogether. He could no more have devoured the contents of the myriad sheets of news and comment, of correspondence and general topics, of novelties and gossip, as the Americans devoured them, than he could have smoked and chewed as they did. Sometimes, when there was news from the Golden State, he went at it eagerly enough, feeling about it as he had felt, when he and Walter were there, about England, and the old ways of the forsaken world beyond the two oceans. But in general he was indifferent, and this peculiarity Deering,

whom few things escaped, had soon noticed.

There had been no news of interest for some time, and Lawrence was less than ever anxious to know what was in the papers, when one day, at the public dining-table, he heard some people talking of great floods which had done considerable damage in a district of Placer County. There had been, it appeared, great atmospheric disturbance, tremendous rain, and a sudden swelling of the river and its tributary streams. One of the gentlemen present had had a letter, containing particulars, and finding Daly interested in the subject, he detailed them. It was strange and pleasant to Lawrence to hear again the names and places he had been so long familiar with. In the evening he read a long and flourishing newspaper version of the occurrence, and sat, looking at the words, with his thoughts far away, amid the grim desolation of the scene.

No lives had been lost, but a good deal of damage had been done by the flood, and Daly would have liked to know how their former claim and the lone hut had fared in the turmoil.

"I wonder whether it is still standing," he thought, "or whether the waters poured into the ravine, tumbled down the face of the old rock there, and swept it away with them. I wonder whether the whole aspect of the place is changed. The lone hut is of too little importance to be mentioned here, I suppose. If Deering is right —and no doubt he is—it does not matter; it never could have mattered, in one way or the other; but if Walter really had buried the gold, and really had made a memorandum of its whereabouts, it would not have availed now, according to this. These tearing floods efface huge landmarks in a few moments; who can tell how this one may

have changed all the features of the small space within which his choice of a hiding-place lay. —There I am, trying back on that old scent again, after all my resolutions, proving to myself, often as I have protested the contrary, how hard it is to recover a downright, knock-down blow of ill-luck. I ought to be quite over it by this time, especially as I am turning our dust to some purpose, thanks to Deering mainly. He's a clever fellow, and I think a better one than Walter fancied him. The flood did a good deal of damage in Cobb's Valley, I see: I wonder if it swept over the burying-ground, and tore up the headstones; in that case poor Spoiled Five's wooden cross—the memorial of him to a whole race of strangers —is gone too."

Lawrence and Deering had a good deal of business in common just then, and when they met next day, they began to discuss it

at once, and no mention was made of the news of the great flood in the Golden State. Daly thought of it afterwards, and was glad he had not talked about it.

"I am determined I will not," he thought; "it would only tempt me into talking of that unlucky nugget to Deering again, and I am determined henceforth it shall rest."

And so a word which might have availed much, remained, by the decree of fate, unspoken.

Mr. Deering had been deeply engaged with his correspondence before he went to his appointment with Lawrence on the day in question. It was not voluminous, and it was not various, but it was exceedingly engrossing, and Deering had apparently reached a puzzling stage in it. He walked moodily about a room, very different in its decorations from that which he had abandoned, after prudential calculation, cogitat-

ing intently, and turning his eyes from time to time upon the large paper-strewn table at which he had been sitting.

"It is too soon," he muttered—"too soon to tell him, to induce him to go to England. There is a good deal to be done with him here yet, and the other thing will keep—will be all the better for keeping, indeed—until I have made all there is to be made here out of his resources and my own. The prize is safe enough; it will not slip away, but this opportunity might. No, he must not know: he must not go yet; it is too soon. If the time had come, I wonder whether he would go and put in his claim, or be magnanimous and renounce it. He is fool enough for anything of that kind, and that would be a stopper. Let me see."

He halted beside the table, and took up a large sheet of foolscap, on which certain slips cut from newspapers, in different

kinds of type, and varying in length, were pasted. He was perfectly familiar with them, and yet he read them over slowly and half aloud. A thin slip, containing merely the name of the newspaper from which it was extracted, and the date of its issue, was pasted half an inch above each of these paragraphs:

The "Times," Wednesday, July—, 186—.

"INFORMATION REQUIRED.—Any person who can give information respecting Lawrence Daly, who left England, in 186—, for New York, it is supposed, with the intention of proceeding to the Far West, will be handsomely rewarded on communicating with Monsieur Caux, Rue de la Flèche, Paris."

The "Times," Monday, August—, 186—.

"Lawrence Daly, who left England in 186—, is earnestly requested to communicate with his nearest relative. He will find

compliance with this request very much to his advantage. Address, L. C., care of Monsieur Caux, Rue de la Flèche, Paris."

"*New York Herald*," *September* —, 186—.

"Information concerning the whereabouts, or, if he be not living, the death of Mr. Lawrence Daly, supposed to have been in the city of New York, in the Summer of 186—, is earnestly requested, and will be handsomely paid for by Monsieur Caux, Rue de la Flèche, Paris."

"*New York Sentinel*," *September* —, 186—.

"L. D.—If you will let me know where you are you shall not regret it. My promise to 'Aunt Kate' shall yet be fulfilled. Let bygones be bygones, and write at once to me, under cover to Monsieur Caux, Rue de la Flèche, Paris."

"A clever calculator, no doubt, could tell

exactly how many to one the chances ought to have been in favour of Daly's seeing all these, and of my *not* seeing the first of them. But calculation is gravely out sometimes. If I had seen the second and not the third, it would have made a considerable difference to me. A hundred pounds when I place Monsieur Caux and Lawrence Daly in direct communication, and the strictest secrecy observed concerning the date of my reply to the advertisement. After all, was it weak of me to stipulate for that? When I have got all the money there's to be had out of Daly's dear repentant relative over there, and all the money there's to be had out of Daly himself here, what does it matter to me what he thinks of me, especially as I hope he will have before long been my unconscious benefactor to an extent of which we are at this moment both in ignorance. The pear is getting ripe; it will soon be time

to shake the tree, but not yet. The repentant relative must suffer a little more remorse and suspense first, until we see what's coming of *Ontarios*, at all events."

He huddled up the scattered papers, and locked them into a drawer. Then, struck by a sudden thought, he stood for a moment with his hand on the key.

"It's cutting it rather close, this delay. Just suppose Walter Clint should see the advertisement in the *Times*, and volunteer the required information! By Jove! that would be a crooked turn of my luck. However, one must risk something, and I don't risk *money*. But there's not much time to spare now."

CHAPTER IV.

AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.

IN a vast and splendid apartment on the *rez-de-chaussée* of a fine hôtel in Paris, belonging, not to the extravagant latter days of the Second Empire, but to its more solid middle period, we find Miriam St. Quentin, a year after her father's death. How much resemblance does she bear to the handsome school-girl, who, hardly five years ago, looked at her bright young face in the glass before she ran down-stairs to take her first independent step in life, the selection of a waiting-maid? How much, in mind or person? What marks has time

set upon her face and upon her heart, in that progression to which standing still is as impossible as it is to the waves of the sea?

It was the early Winter-time, and the air was clear, bright, and crisply cold. Miriam was in her boudoir, a large room, with a richly-furnished conservatory at one end, where there was a crystal fountain with an alabaster basin, wherein gold and silver fish disported themselves, and an aviary tenanted by bright-winged birds, where there was a background of strange tropical growths and feathery frondage, from which banks of gorgeous blossoms, and velvet leaves, with cunningly disposed lights dispersed among them sloped downwards, and surrounded the fountain in semicircular form, with an interval of marble mosaic. The air was warm and perfumed; the feathery rain of the fountain mingled its sound with the coo-

ing voices of the doves nestling behind the silver wires of their cage; beyond the silken curtains lay the boudoir, in which every modern luxury was accumulated for the pleasure of its owner. Things at once beautiful and precious met the eye on every side, and on all was set the impress of supreme good taste, in harmony of colour, of design, of arrangement. A wood-fire burned upon the wide hearth, and a glass screen framed in an ivy wreath of malachite stood between it and the low chair in which Miriam was sitting. She was leaning forward, her eyes fixed apparently upon the rose-coloured reflection of the flame in the sheet of crystal, her hands clasped round her knees. Miriam had not yet laid aside her mourning; her rich, plain dress was black, and its soft thick folds well became her full dignified figure. Five years ago, Miriam Clint had been a handsome girl, to

whom probably no one would have applied the much misused term "beautiful." Now she might have claimed the epithet, fairly, in most of the positions and expressions of her face and form. The consummate ease and tranquillity, the assured self-possession, the habit of being implicitly obeyed, the entire and placid consciousness of importance to which all self-assertion is superfluous, of a thoroughly prosperous and well-trained woman of the world, were all discernible in Miriam St. Quentin. A hasty, ungraceful movement, a loud tone, a vehement expression, a *gaucherie* of any kind, would have been as impossible to her as if she had been born and reared in that calm world of impassive greatness and social importance wherein such things have to the vulgar eye no existence. Clever and resolute as she was when she had made her bargain with the future, she had determined

that not only would she have all the good things of this life with which her marriage could provide her, but that she would get out of them the very most they could be made to yield. And so she studied, not only what the women of the great world, who had wealth, luxury, taste, and freedom, enjoyed, but after what fashion they enjoyed them. She had a great deal more ability than most of them, and, at this time of her life, quite as little heart as any, and she learnt the ways of them and of their world with much readiness and completeness. Composed, proud, exquisite in tact and manner, Miriam was now a beautiful woman, whom all "society" everywhere admitted to be "perfectly charming," and who had not an intimate friend in the world except Florence, whom she had not seen for ten months.

The touch of time, while it had improved

her actual beauty, added refinement to the features which had no classical regularity, touched the broad temples with finer lines of thought and knowledge, deepened the searching glances of the glorious golden eyes, and set a mark of will and decision upon the soft, full, delicately-tinted lips, had told upon her too. Miriam had nothing girlish left about her looks. She was a woman in the full bloom and strength and pride of her beauty, but a woman who looked every hour of her years, who was as completely, though not so widely, separated from girlhood as from age.

She sat still, gazing on the little sparkles of flame reflected in the sheet of crystal. The streak of colour beneath her eyelids was as delicate as ever; but it had deepened to-day into a rosy flush, and there was a sparkle in the fixed eyes, which might have told an observer that Miriam's mind was not so idle as her hands.

The velvet table by her side was heaped with books; books in English bindings, *brochures* in their paper covers; a salverful of cards and unopened notes vainly asked for her attention—she heeded none of them. Presently, disturbed, it seemed, by the chiming of a timepiece, she rose, and walked slowly into the conservatory, pausing before the aviary, and idly watching the fluttering of the birds.

"What does it mean?" she muttered—"what does it mean? I think and think; I turn in my mind every particle of knowledge I have managed to acquire respecting the past; I watch him closely; and yet *I know* there is something going on that I cannot fathom. The alteration in his manner, everything, confirms me in this belief. He has almost ceased to watch me. Why? There never was any cause, except in his own suspicious mind and depraved imagination. But whence the change?"

She beckoned to the birds, and put her fingers through the bars of the cage. The bright-winged creatures came and pecked at them, nibbling the rosy finger-tips, and fluttering with joy. She presented a perfect picture of happiness, beauty, leisure, and luxury in the framework of that beautiful scene, and yet, she was troubled, uncertain, nervous, *afraid.* No trace of any of those feelings was to be found in her composed mien or on her beautiful face, but she knew they were there, and she was doing battle with them by the aid of reason, and getting worsted, for they had their origin chiefly in impressions which defied her judgment.

"I must and will find out what he is doing," so ran her thoughts. "Bianca does not know, poor ignorant wretch; she is only fit for the post of spy, not for the position of confidante. His skilful stroke of tyranny, as he thought it, in forcing me to keep her in

my service, has been a consummate failure. As if *she* could have hindered me from doing anything I chose to do, or discovered anything I chose to hide!" A faint disdainful smile crossed Miriam's lips, and in the same instant she chirruped to the birds, and smoothed a ringdove's sleek head with her fair fingers. "Who is this man who calls here so frequently, and has long conferences with him in his study, and what are these papers he is perpetually brooding over? Can he be meditating treachery towards me? His relaxed vigilance and his increased gentleness are quite enough to set anyone who knows him so thoroughly as I do, on the alert. My mind is so full of this, I can think of nothing else. It makes me forget even Florence and Walter. And I cannot tell her, I cannot trouble her peace and joy, after her long trial. And, besides, what is there to tell? It is all suspicion; there are

no facts to lay hold of, or facts so few and so slight that I could not so place them before her as to give them the weight *I know* they have."

She sighed, and raising her hands higher on the wires of the cage, leaned her forehead against them, and so stood for many minutes profoundly still. From this attitude the entrance of a servant, to announce that her carriage waited, roused her, and she returned to the fireside in the boudoir, opened the notes which lay on the table, glanced over them, threw them into the fireplace, and slowly left the room.

A splendid carriage, turned out in the best possible style, with superb bay horses, and servants in long coats and valuable furs, was drawn up under the wide glazed portico. Presently Miriam appeared at the top of the short flight of steps, where orange-trees stood in majolica tubs on either side.

She was ceremoniously escorted by Mr. St. Quentin, who handed her into the carriage with a polite and audible expression of his regret that he did not feel sufficiently well to accompany her in her drive. The carriage turned out of the great echoing gateway, and Miriam was thinking: "What a pleasant drive I shall have! only I wish I knew what it is that has made him change his tactics so completely. The result is so pleasant and welcome, I wish I could be satisfied there is no danger in the cause."

How has time dealt with Mr. St. Quentin since that remarkably well-preserved gentleman has been in possession of the choicest blessings of existence—a large fortune, freedom to enjoy it according to his own tastes, perfect leisure, and a beautiful young wife? It is a little more than five years since he returned to England, and he has no cause to complain of any undue havoc in his well-

cared-for personal appearance. Perhaps no one would be likely to guess his present age so far short of the truth as almost everyone had guessed it five years previously. But he was not, even yet, irrevocably in the category of "old men." Partial friends and toadies might still designate him an "elderly gentleman," and strangers be introduced to him and Miriam without having their sense of incongruity quickened into actual disgust. His figure was still upright and active, and his hair plentiful, though grizzled. His correct, tasteful, appropriate style of dress, entirely free from affectation of youthfulness, was also as free from carelessness, and he was altogether a "personable" man. Very close observers, familiar with Mr. St. Quentin's appearance at the period of his return from India, might have noticed that he did not look so amiable, so ready and easy to be pleased, as in those

days; that he was more silent, and seemed at times to have "something on his mind," of a nature inconsistent with the general prosperity of his condition.

There was not the least suspicion afloat among the society in which Miriam and her husband lived that their marriage was not a happy one—happy, that is to say, in modern society's sense of that word. They were not supposed to be romantically attached, but that kind of thing was never thought of among well-bred people, even when no discrepancy of age existed. Mere vulgar honest love did very well to cheer the existence of the lower classes; but it did not count in the fine, gay, luxurious, great world, in which there is not the least occasion for two persons to bore each other, if they happen to disagree, or to have had enough of one another, or severally to prefer somebody else, and where all these contingencies

may be provided for with perfect decorum. It was allowed, on the other hand, that the reciprocal demeanour of Mr. and Mrs. St. Quentin was simply perfect. On his side, alertness, attention, well-bred gallantry; on hers, consideration, frank kindliness, with just the slightest touch of that delightful deference to his age, which was so very charming. The *aplomb*, and the perfect freedom of a wife, combined with something gently respectful, which caused everyone to remember that she was young enough to be his daughter. There appeared to be a wonderful accord in their tastes. That Miriam should enjoy society, and should be seen wheresoever the fashionable world gathered itself together, was of course quite natural; but Mr. St. Quentin was in this, as in every other respect, a model husband. He went everywhere with Miriam, and he seemed to like it. He had nothing of the henpecked

husband. Then, her dress was superb, and her jewels enough to make angels envious; there was nothing in Paris better than her equipage; of a surety, Mrs. St. Quentin was a fortunate woman.

Mr. St. Quentin belonged to a *cercle*, where he played occasionally, decorously. He rode a fine horse, sitting well, and looking less than his age in the saddle. No one could accuse him of a deficiency in the virtue of hospitality; in that respect he subscribed implicitly to the laws of society, and took care never to be on the debtor's side; but yet he was not popular, as his wife was in a superficial way. His was a cold and selfish nature, and this truth—which more surely than all besides alienates affection and friendship—was understood and felt, so that Mr. St. Quentin had no friends. His real relations with Miriam were known to themselves alone; even Bianca's acquaintance

with them was superficial, and though she regarded them with all the coarse misconception of a mind at once vicious and ignorant, she was in reality far from estimating aright their deadly discord and animosity. Of late, Miriam's letters to her sister-in-law had contained no lively allusions to Mr. St. Quentin's ridiculous jealousy, no mischievous record of her perverse playing upon this dangerous weakness. Florence observed the omission with thankfulness, but she was wise enough to make no comment upon it.

"Dear Miriam has found out her error, and she is repairing it. Everything is right between them, and nothing is now wanting to my happiness," thought Florence, in her simple way; she to whom to discover a fault in her own conduct, and to confess and rectify it, were natural and simultaneous operations of the conscience and the will.

"I thought he could hardly fail to appreciate her thoroughly, when once he had gotten the better of his besetting sin and folly." It never occurred to Florence that there are people who cherish their besetting sins, even when they know them perfectly, and make idols of their leading follies.

Miriam's change of tone was in reality due to a very different cause. The matter had become too serious for jesting, and had developed features concerning which she could not consult Florence. There were times when she seriously believed Mr. St. Quentin to be mad, or nearly so, and a deeply-rooted uneasiness had taken possession of her mind. Their private relations were as bad and unnatural as their demeanour in public, though without any mutual arrangement or understanding, was faultless. Each could trust the pride of the other on this point thoroughly. At home they rarely met.

There was no more interference with Miriam, no curious inquiries into her correspondence, no spying out of her ways. But this change did not re-assure Miriam, though it relieved her. Mr. St. Quentin's presence had become disagreeable to her; her liking for him had died away before the contempt with which he had inspired her. It would have been too much to expect a girl like Miriam to be logical; too much to expect that she would have recognised the reasonableness with which a man may conclude that a woman whom he knows he has bought is not to be trusted. It was only too true that she had come to hate him; but she had hated him with less bitterness and consistency when he worried her and insulted her by his suspicions, bored her mercilessly with his company and his flattery than now, when he was perfectly polite, distant, and estranged. It made Miriam

desperately angry with herself to know that she was afraid of him. She had almost pitied the old man at times, when, in his absurd jealousy, and determination to watch her, he had run serious risks rather than allow her to go out without him, and yet had scornfully refused her offer to relinquish her engagements, and remain at home. But now all was changed. She had no more pity for him, but serious apprehension for herself. She had unfettered liberty of action, and yet she had never felt less free. Something she was ignorant of was in the atmosphere of her life, and to natures like hers only the unknown is terrible.

Mr. St. Quentin had never mentioned Walter Clint's name to Miriam since they had left England. When she learned that her brother had returned to the Firs, she told Mr. St. Quentin the fact. He replied that he wished to know nothing whatever

about Mr. Walter Clint, and that he forbade any further mention of him or his wife—the one was a systematic liar, the other an adventuress. It was after this that he relinquished the former system of spying upon her, and their domestic life underwent a complete alteration.

But though Mr. St. Quentin kept aloof from her, and intruded no more upon her occupations, thus depriving her of the means of knowing how his own time was passed, Miriam became aware, by various little indications, that some matter was of interest to him which had formerly not existed. Mr. St. Quentin's "business" had been conducted with much simplicity and celerity, and had chiefly consisted in the signing of cheques. Miriam knew that his money was principally invested in Indian securities, but that he always had a large sum on deposit at the Bank of France. He was in the habit

of receiving a few letters from India occasionally, but he carried on no active business transactions now with that country, and Miriam was aware that his fortune was growing. He was a more wealthy man than when she had found in his wealth a way of escape.

Perhaps it was money-making, speculation of some sort, which was engrossing him now. Avarice, said to be the favourite vice of age, was laying its hold on him perhaps, and that of other and lesser passions was loosened. If so, it was avarice without its customary exterior. He did not save money, because he was making it. He was ostentatiously profuse in his expenditure, and Miriam had more and more luxury in her life, and the command of much larger sums, every shilling of which she expended recklessly, than formerly. In her extravagance he never checked her. Her love of luxury and adorn-

ment he seemed to regard with pleasure, not easily to be reconciled with his indifference to herself, and the silent, rigid estrangement which he was apparently determined to maintain. Every wish, every fancy of hers, was punctiliously gratified by him, when such wishes or fancies lay outside the limits of her individual control. Only in the one particular of going to England, and thus having an opportunity of seeing her brother, did Miriam feel herself powerless; and Florence's silence on the point made her understand that she and Walter knew the truth. It was therefore with surprise, not unmixed with uneasiness, that Miriam, one evening about this time, heard her husband speak to a lady, at a dinner-party at their own house, of the probability of their being in England at Christmas. The lady expressed her sentiments of congratulation at this prospect of participation in the "so-

English pleasures" of the season, and went chattering on about all that English people are supposed to do and to feel at that extremely unpleasant time of year. Mr. St. Quentin listened, and explained courteously; but Miriam was perfectly aware that he was watching her, and highly as she resented his having taken this means of informing her of his intentions, she preserved an appearance of perfect unconcern. Next day, she said to her husband—

"Do you intend that we shall go to England this Winter?"

"I do," he replied. "You heard me say so last night, I think?"

"Do you mean to remain there any time?"

"That will entirely depend on circumstances. I am going to England for a special purpose, and my movements will be regulated accordingly."

"Am I to be informed of this special purpose?"

"You are not. It is no affair of yours."

Miriam glanced at him with a contemptuous smile, and bent her head.

"I wish to give you fair notice," she continued, "that when we go to England, it is my intention to see my brother. I am entirely resolved on this point. Nothing will make me alter my resolution."

"You can see your brother and whom you please, when we go to England," said Mr. St. Quentin. And with that their interview came to an end.

Miriam was confounded by this turn of affairs; but she maintained her composure, and bravely hid the smarting wound to her pride. This had occurred several days ago, and Miriam had not received any intimation from Mr. St. Quentin of the time at which he intended to leave Paris. She sickened with anger at being obliged to endure this sort of thing from the old man, with whom

she had intended to have her own way so completely, but no human being ever saw a look or heard a word expressive of her disgust.

On this day, when her carriage had driven away, Mr. St. Quentin went direct to her boudoir, and, having closed the door, stood with his back against it, deliberately surveying every detail of its luxurious adornment. A bad, cynical smile accompanied the slow travelling of his eyes from point to point. Then he walked across the spacious room to the silk-curtained archway which formed the entrance to the conservatory, where the fountain was showering down its tinkling rain, and Miriam's birds were fluttering behind the silver wires. From this point he again surveyed the room, and now he laughed, a low, evil laugh.

"She likes all this," he muttered. "What taste she has!—and what a love of luxury

and ease! She shall have it, plenty of it, as much as she likes, *for awhile.* No fear of her giving *this* up; no fear of her running away from *this;* no fear of her giving up money, even for *love.*"

His well-preserved, good-looking old face was a sight to see for vindictiveness and cunning. He smoothed it and his gray hair all over with his hand before he left the room, and went to keep an appointment with a person who had visited him occasionally of late, and whose visits formed an item in the list of Miriam's anxious misgivings.

CHAPTER V.

REVOLT.

WHEN Miriam returned from her drive, she asked of the footman in attendance in the hall: Who had called during her absence? The footman mentioned only one name, but it gave Miriam something to think of.

Mrs. St. Quentin received that evening, and did so with a grace which would have surprised her friends at Drington, and filled Miss Monitor with amazement. Deportment and manners of that style never came out of any London school, but were the result of Miriam's steady application of her keen

intelligence with a fixed purpose. She was as elegant and refined a woman as she was handsome; and her social success was perfect. It would be a great mistake to suppose that Miriam was positively unhappy because her management of Mr. St. Quentin had not proved so skilful and successful as she had intended it to be, or that she experienced any of the forlorn dreariness in the midst of all the good things of this world, which comes to those who have, "instead of fruit, chewed bitter ashes." She was uneasy now, and vaguely apprehensive, but she enjoyed her life for all that, and had not the remotest notion that there might, in one moment, arise for her a spectre in her path, which must turn all this gold-bedecked existence of hers into aching bitterness and regret, and that the spectre's name was Love. Long after, Miriam knew how merciful fate had been to

her, and what tremendous temptation and danger had been spared her, in the days when she really believed in money, and never thought about love.

The reception had nearly come to an end, and Miriam, looking superbly handsome, was standing in the centre of the *salon*, surrounded by a group of talkers, about to disperse. The subject under discussion was handwriting, and an English lady had just remarked that the handwriting of all French people seemed alike to her; she could not believe in the truth of a pretension to the discernment of character from it; though it might be possible in the case of English caligraphy.

"That is only because you are not accustomed to French writing, Mrs. Denison," said Miriam. "It is just in the same way that so many faces look the same to one, seen in a crowd, and yet, examined in de-

tail, are all different. French people call our style 'English writing,' just as distinctively as we call theirs 'French.'"

"It makes no difference to me," said the lady whose talent in the divination of character from handwriting had given rise to the conversation, "to what nation the writer belongs, nor whether I can read the words. The truth is, I can only read two languages —my own (French) and Spanish. I do not understand a word of English or German, and yet I have frequently been singularly correct in my interpretation of character from handwritings in both these languages."

Miriam was politely interested. A whimsical idea struck her, and an amused smile played upon her lips. She had in her possession a letter, written by the hand of one person at the dictation of another. If there really was anything in the pretensions of this quasi-science, here would be a good

opportunity of testing it. Could the mere formation of words on paper, with pen and ink, unguided uninspired by the actual writer, emanating from the mind and intention of another person, convey to the diviner any impression of the character of an individual who had acted in a merely mechanical capacity? Or would the absence of meaning, *to the writer*, render the handwriting all blank and meaningless to the diviner? If the latter should prove to be the case, Miriam would feel there was more in this pretension than any amount of description, that might partake, more or less, of happy accident, could induce her to believe. She immediately expressed much interest and curiosity respecting the strange faculty of Madame de la Salle, and an eager desire to see it exercised. But Madame de la Salle did her divination seriously, and explained that she always required to be quite alone

and undisturbed when she applied herself to the practice of her art. So the envelopes and half-sheets of letters which had begun to emerge from the pockets of some of the members of the group surrounding Miriam, retired into obscurity again, and the subject dropped. But presently Miriam drew Madame de la Salle aside, just within the drapery of the arch which divided the *salon* from her boudoir, as the boudoir was divided from the conservatory, and asked her if she might send her a sample of handwriting on which to test her skill. Madame de la Salle would be delighted.

"It is a letter, written in English," said Miriam.

"So much the better; it is all the more convincing, if I succeed. If I shall send you a good description of your correspondent; hold—do not tell me who it is, or whether you care at all for the writer, or not—taken

from writing of which I cannot understand a word, you will not think any longer I am what you call—it is your grand English word, *I do* know that much, for everything you do not comprehend—a *omebog.*"

Miriam laughed, and assured Madame de la Salle she should put the most absolute faith in her report. "I wonder," she thought, "whether it will bear any affinity to the description of Daly, I had from Florence, and which Walter has supplemented once or twice." It was arranged that she should send the letter to Madame de la Salle on the following day, and the lady retired. Shortly afterwards, Miriam being alone, and the impression made by this little incident remaining on her mind, she thought she would put the letter in an envelope at once, ready to be sent to Madame de la Salle in the morning. A slight incident, destined to have a considerable result.

A cabinet of ebony and silver, with grotesque handles, formed one of the ornaments of Miriam's boudoir, and was the receptacle of the few letters she considered worth preserving. She seated herself in front of this cabinet, and opened the lock—which was of a cunning device, and formed the orifice of the mouth of a grinning dragon—with a silver key attached to her watch-chain. The opened doors, lined with fine inlaid-work, of the same precious materials, but of more minute pattern than the exterior, disclosed a row of shallow drawers, whose locks, miniatures in their ornaments of the master-lock, were subject to the same key. Miriam had no distinct recollection of the drawer in which she had put away the letter she was searching for, so she began to pull them out, one after another, leisurely, commencing from the top, and lingering, as one is apt to do, over a search of the kind, open-

ing letters for which one is not looking, turning over forgotten odds and ends, and letting one's mind yield to the old associations revived by such things.

The letter which Miriam was looking for was not in the top-drawer, nor in the second. She lingered a long time over the third. It contained a medley of papers and trifles —small trinkets which Miriam had worn in her girlhood, but which were far too valueless and insignificant for Mrs. St. Quentin. A dreadful cornelian brooch, given her by Charley Boscombe, and for which she had been forced to invent an imaginary origin, was among them. She took it out, and looked at it smiling. "Just imagine my ever having thought that thing beautiful," she said to herself; "and actually telling the most abominable lies that I might be allowed to wear it! And the lies were all for its own sake, too, not for Charley Bos-

combe's. I never cared a straw about him. I wonder what has become of him? There, it may stay in its corner." And so she put the brooch back, and went on with her search among the papers. But the letter was not in the third drawer. It was the same thing with the others. And at last Miriam sat before the cabinet, the lower drawer of the row open before her, its late contents in her lap, and her hands hanging idly down. The letter was not there! Miriam did not keep papers, except her bills, which were all in her writing-table, with her cheque-book and her household documents, in any other place; she had no papers but these. Either the letter she was searching for was in that cabinet, or it was lost. She had received the letter in question in Mr. St. Quentin's presence; and, after reading a few lines, she had left the room, and finished the perusal in her bedroom,

with locked doors. She had cried over the letter, she remembered, and Mr. St. Quentin had watched her all the remainder of the day with unbearable pertinacity; and had—*àpropos* of the remark that her eyes looked as if she had been crying, and that their beauty was not enhanced by the circumstance—asked her from whom this letter came.

"From my brother. You have bidden me not to mention him. Why do you oblige me to do so?" she had replied, angrily.

Mr. St. Quentin had answered never a word.

Miriam further remembered that she had carried this letter about with her for some days, in its envelope, which had been addressed to her by Florence, and posted at Drington. She remembered the date. The letter ought, if she had put it away with her

accustomed regularity, to be in the packet contained in the last drawer but one. She had sorted the whole of that packet—some of its contents were in envelopes, some were not. Again she went over them, carefully; and there was Florence's envelope, containing *a blank sheet of paper*. Then it flashed across her memory that, some days after the receipt of the letter, she had ordered Bianca to bring it to her, with the other things then in the pocket of a morning gown she had just taken off, and had added it to the packet in the drawer of the cabinet, without opening the envelope.

It took Miriam a good deal of time to recall these small incidents, and to make herself perfectly certain about them. But when she had the circumstances before her, the explanation of them came with a flash. Her face turned pale and rigid, and she drew one deep breath. Then she rose, slowly replaced

all the contents of the cabinet, closed and locked its doors, and left the room.

Mr. St. Quentin's rooms were on the opposite side of the vestibule. Miriam knocked at the door of the dressing-room, which was opened by her husband's valet, who looked considerably astonished at beholding her. Mr. St. Quentin, in a superb dressing-gown, was sitting by the fire, reading, and the wax-lights shone on a toilet apparatus to the full as luxurious as Miriam's. Mr. St. Quentin looked up from his book, as much surprised as the man, to whom Miriam said:

"You may go. I wish to speak to Mr. St. Quentin."

The valet obeyed. Miriam walked up to the fireplace, laid her arm upon the mantelpiece, and, looking down at her husband with a frown on her face, said:

"You employed Bianca to steal a letter from me several months ago. I did not

find it out until to-night. Where is that letter?"

Mr. St. Quentin shut his book, and flung it on the floor.

"What do you mean?" he began.

Miriam's fingers tapped the velvet-covered slab, as she said:

"You had better give me back that letter, and explain your conduct. You don't like scandals, you know, and you prize the good opinion of the world. So do I, in a measure, but not beyond measure; not enough, for instance, to be induced to live in this house an hour beyond to-morrow, unless you give me back that letter."

"Are you mad?—are you mad?"

"Not in the least; but I think you must have been when you ventured on treating *me* after such a fashion. Come, Mr. St. Quentin"—her fingers tapped the velvet slab anew—"give me the letter which

Bianca stole from me by your orders."

Mr. St. Quentin looked very old and very ugly as he answered her, glancing obliquely at her handsome figure and scornful pale face.

"You deceived me; you lied to me about that, as you have deceived and lied to me a hundred times before. It was my right to find out your disgraceful deceit by every means in my power."

"Even by bribing an ignorant servant to act as your spy. I am edified by your morality, but I am not going to discuss it. Nor am I about to endeavour to disabuse your mind of the monstrous delusion under which you labour. It is not worth my while. I merely require the restoration of my brother's letter."

"Your *brother's* letter!—you impudent, lying jade! How dare you venture to try such a bare-faced imposture upon me! I

know enough about your *brother's* letters—when your lover wrote to you under the convenient cover of your brother's wife's masquerade in my house! How *dare* you tell me *this* lie now!"

He was almost inarticulate with rage. Miriam had started, as if he had struck her, at his words of coarse abuse—the first he had ever used to her—but she let him go on.

"Your brother's letter! You must have forgotten it, or you would not venture on so clumsy a cheat as this. But you have gone too far, madam, much too far. The *rôle* of the complaisant husband does not suit me any longer, as you will find. I will yet discover who the man is for whom you have deceived me from the first, and defeat all your calculations."

Miriam looked at him with quite unaffected wonder. Her anger had almost

passed away in amazement and contempt. So had her vague fear of him. This was beyond bearing, and she did not mean to bear it.

"I have not deceived you," she said calmly. "You have deceived yourself. You are the victim of senseless jealousy and contemptible suspicion. There is not, there never was, any man in the case. I confess I have sometimes amused myself by making you think there was, and thus befooling you and your spy. I am sorry for it; I did it, quite unconscious of the depth and seriousness of the canker in your unhappy mind. You have no right to insult me, though I did marry you without love for you. It was a fair bargain. I did not deceive you then—I have not deceived you since. Your mad and foolish jealousy first displayed itself about my brother. It was proved to you, beyond even your power to dispute, that

the confidence and the correspondence you then resented were about, and with him only. That might have satisfied you, I think, and cured you of your folly. Do you think, because I am your wife, and ought never to have become so, I have no self-respect on *any* subject? Do you think I have no conscience to hear and to obey?"

"I think you are a liar," he answered her brutally. "I think you are lying now, as you lied then, you and your confederate. I have the worst opinion of you, as I have of your brother, and I would not believe either of you on your oath. You think you can deceive me now, but you are mistaken. You think I have no means of convicting you. But I have a specimen of your brother's handwriting in my possession, and if the shameful contents of the letter which you claim, and which you shall not have, were not sufficient to convict you of so gross

and impudent a fable, the writing would do so. It is not your brother's."

"I know that. Give me back the letter."

She had removed her arm from the mantelpiece, and was now standing before him, her hands by her sides, twisted in the folds of her gown, as though she were trying to keep down a gust of passionate anger.

"I will not." He rose, pushed back his chair, and confronted her. A horrid sight, with his gray hair and anger-flushed old face.

"Is this a final reply, Mr. St. Quentin?"

"It is. I will never give you that letter."

"Then I will never give *you* an explanation of it. Think what you will about it, inflict as much torture upon yourself by means of it as the ingenuity of jealousy and suspicion can suggest. I hope these resources may prove fertile. Never, from this hour until that of your death or mine,

will I tell you the truth, or any part of it, concerning that letter; and I will never pardon your conduct to me to-night. You have spoken words to me which I know you have often wished to speak, but you did not dare. You have overcome that scruple, and so much the worse for you!"

She turned her back upon him, as he remembered she had done on the occasion of their first quarrel, when she had torn up the letter, and flung it out of the window, and had her hand on the lock of the door before he said: "Stay; what do you mean?"

"You shall know to-morrow."

She found Mr. St. Quentin's valet in the ante-room, and sent him to his master, then went to her own room, where Bianca sat yawning and sulky. Miriam gave the woman one look, which had a surprising effect. She started, and asked her mistress, timidly, what had happened.

"Nothing that you need know," was the answer. "I have found you out to be a thief; I have always known you to be a spy. You—you will leave my house to-morrow, and my room this moment." She held the door open with one hand, and pointed to it with the other. Cowed by the disdainful anger in her eyes, Bianca left the room without a word.

Miriam locked the door, and sitting down at her toilet-table, began to take the pins out of her hair.

"So it has come to this"—thus ran her thoughts—"that I must give it all up. There is a price which even I, who have not learned to think less about it, but more, cannot consent to pay for wealth. I shall return to the Firs; Walter and Florence will receive me gladly, I know, and they will never reproach me. After what he has said to-night, the sight of this

hateful old man will be for ever intolerable to me. I could not endure it, for all he has to give. I have indeed realized all Florence's misgivings; but even she, when she hears this, will say I have done well. What was it he called me, this accomplished gentleman, whose manner to his wife is so perfect in society—'an impudent, lying jade,' was it not? I don't think my father ever called me that, or thought it of me, in his worst temper. Mr. St. Quentin shall not say those words to me twice, nor any words like them, ever again. It is hard to have to own myself beaten; but there are harder things than that, and I can but choose the least hard. I will write to Walter to-morrow, and tell him to come and take me away, and I know he will do it. More than that, I know he will never reproach me with the unlucky ending of my great speculation.

"What were the words of the letter Mr. Daly wrote for him? I hope they were sufficiently ambiguous to confirm Mr. St. Quentin in his belief in their origin, if he has set to work to read them, in order to nourish his wrath, the moment I left him. There was a grateful reference to my fidelity to the promise I had given him, during the time which had seemed so unendurably long; an assurance of the unchanging love which he cherished for me; a reference to the time when neither of us had any consolation but the other; and then he said that, though all the circumstances were so entirely changed, he and I should always be the same, and that I should be rewarded for my truth to him. Yes, I think that was all; and there was no signature, and the letter began with, 'My own dear Miriam.' No doubt it has made Mr. St. Quentin uncomfortable; and if this occurrence did not

make me quite certain that the old man's ruling passion is hopeless of cure, and must continue to beset my life in a way which, for the insult and the living lie of it, would be quite intolerable—I should be a fool to throw up my cards at this stage of the game. But I know myself, and I can't stand any more."

Miriam slept soundly, notwithstanding her discomfiture, and awoke at the usual hour next morning with her mind unaltered.

She dressed herself without assistance, and then rang for Bianca, who came to her pale and silent. She paid the woman her wages, added a gift for travelling expenses, if she chose to return to her country, and dismissed her. The thing was done in five minutes, and Bianca never ventured a remonstrance, or named Mr. St. Quentin.

In a few minutes after Bianca had left her, the valet came to tell her that Mr. St.

Quentin had been very ill all night, and was then in the agonies of a severe fit of gout. At that moment a doctor was with him.

The attack proved to be a serious one, and Miriam's object was indefinitely postponed.

CHAPTER VI.

A CRISIS.

THE crowd of people who find some unaccountable sort of pleasure, arising probably from a subtle amalgamation of idleness and spite, in watching the landing of suffering fellow-creatures from the floating dens of misery in which mankind submits to be conveyed from Calais to Dover, was not so numerous as usual. A merely stormy day has a tendency to attract these ill-conditioned loiterers, as promising more specimens of ludicrous distress and dishevelment, richer opportunities of taking human beings at their utmost disadvantage,

and enjoying with impunity the pleasure of ridicule. But a day which is both wet and stormy—a day on which the puddles are blown about, and hats and bonnets are first drenched and then blown off, on which umbrellas are unmanageable mockeries, and the wind cuts the skin off your face, while the rain slaps it—a day which combines these qualities subdues the popular ardour, and quenches in some degree the unspeakable vulgarity of our English sea-side populace.

It was on such a day, when the wind and the rain were doing their utmost to add to the miseries of a crowd of passengers packed like cattle on the deck of a Calais steamer —when the darkness of a wretched Winter's evening was rapidly coming down upon the scene, which had only a few stragglers to witness its details of extreme discomfort, that Mr. and Mrs. St. Quentin arrived at

Dover. The gas, just lighted, was flickering behind the lamp-glasses in the gusts of wind; the porters and hotel servants, waiting for the coming of the boat, were staggering about, beaten and half-blinded by the wind and rain—no more inhospitable welcome to one's native land could be imagined. Miriam and her husband were not among the tired, draggled, miserable crowd on the deck; they had no intention of proceeding to London by the tidal train, but were in the stifling saloon below, meaning to land when the confusion should have somewhat subsided.

On one of the hard, narrow sofas, covered with furs and soft, warm rugs, lay Mr. St. Quentin; and by his side, on the rocking floor, regardless of the foul atmosphere and horrid surroundings, knelt Miriam, with a stern, set anxiety in her face, holding a tuft of cotton saturated with some strong restora-

tive essence to his nostrils. They were alone in the cabin, their servants were on the deck, and it was evident that Mr. St. Quentin was very ill. But little of his face was visible as he lay shivering underneath his wraps, but that little was ghastly and distorted with pain. Several of the passengers, as they escaped from the foul air of the cabin to the comparative relief of the wet deck and the driving rain and wind, had glanced with pitying wonder at the prostrate man and the kneeling woman. What reason of sufficient urgency could have induced them to cross the Channel in such weather? It had been very little better when they left Calais than it was now, when they were within three minutes of Dover. What reason, indeed? Only the inconceivable, hopeless, irresistible obstinacy of a sick man with a fixed idea; than which there never was a worse or more unanswerable reason.

Nearly a month had elapsed since Mr. St Quentin had been taken ill at Paris; and during the whole of that time, he had fixed his mind, from some motive to which Miriam had no clue, on getting to England. He suffered very much, and by no means patiently. As soon as he succeeded in extracting from his medical attendants an admission that he might travel without actual danger, he insisted on leaving Paris; and he was very near disproving the accuracy of their opinions, for he was so ill and so much exhausted, by the time they arrived at Calais, that he was obliged to remain for several days.

Those were dreary days for Miriam, full of heart-burning, of suspicion, of fear, and of regret. On one of them, she made a discovery. Mr. St. Quentin wanted to write a letter, but had found himself unable to do so, and was obliged to have recourse to the

services of his valet, who shortly afterwards came to Miriam and asked her anxiously whether she thought it would be safe for his master to "cross" on the following day.

"To-morrow?" exclaimed Miriam. "Of course not. I should say it would be impossible. But why do you ask?"

"Because, madam," replied the man, reluctantly, "Mr. St. Quentin has written to a gentleman, a lawyer, from Lincoln's Inn—Mr. Ross, of Messrs. Ross and Raby—making an appointment with him at his chambers for eleven o'clock on Thursday. This is Tuesday, ma'am, and there is only to-morrow."

"Has Mr. St. Quentin said anything to you about his intention?"

"Not yet, ma'am; but he directed me to return, as he had some orders to give me."

"Messrs. Ross and Raby," said Miriam, absently, not heeding what the man had

last said; "I don't know the names. Are they a firm of solicitors?"

"I suppose so, ma'am. Mr. St. Quentin looked them out in the *Times*' sale of lands and houses advertisements, and desired me to write to that address."

"Then you think he does not know these gentlemen personally?"

"I think not, ma'am. When Mr. St. Quentin told me I was to write a letter for him, he was looking down the advertisement columns of the *Times*, and he said to himself: 'Ross and Raby; I think I have heard of them: yes, they will do;' and then he dictated the letter, and I put their address on it."

"Ah, yes," said Miriam; and recovering herself with an effort, she told the man she would see Mr. St. Quentin presently, and dissuade him from attempting to cross, in his state of illness. Already the weather

was unfavourable, and threatened to be worse.

She did see Mr. St. Quentin, and she attempted to dissuade him from his purpose, but in vain. He was coldly, sulkily, immovably determined. She left him, feeling uneasy, but yet persuaded that he could not be, in reality, so ill as he appeared, or he would not subject himself to the risk and suffering of so great an exertion. On the following day, though the weather was worse, and he did not appear to be any better, he persisted in his purpose, and was taken on board the steamer with an amount of difficulty which Miriam expected to find considerably increased when it should come to getting him on shore.

The steamer was alongside the pier; the wretched, draggled, dizzy, tired passengers had landed, and were dispersing, and Miriam's servants had ordered rooms at an hotel, and

had the luggage carried thither. Mr. and Mrs. St. Quentin were the last persons remaining on board. He still lay moaning on the narrow sofa, and she still knelt, holding a restorative to his nostrils. But he must be moved now, and with much difficulty he was carried on shore to the hotel; his face being completely covered, and his form merely a mass of wraps. There was a good deal of bustle on their arrival, and Miriam ordered the men to take him at once to his room. This was done, and the assistants were dismissed, without anyone present having seen the face of the sick man.

Presently he recovered a little strength, and the first use he made of it was to order his valet to despatch a telegram to Messrs. Ross and Raby, directing them to send a confidential clerk to Dover on the following day—"a person competent to take instructions for the preparation of a will," were the

words of the message—as he was detained there by illness.

"I feel I shall not be able to travel for some days," said Mr. St. Quentin; in which the doctor, who was presently sent for to see him, so entirely coincided that he told Miriam he was astonished Mr. St. Quentin had outlived the journey from Paris.

Miriam was inexperienced, and had never yet associated any serious idea with Mr. St. Quentin's illness. All old men had gout, she believed; and, of course, if he would persist in taking doses of powerful and dangerous medicines to check it, instead of staying quietly in his bed, and suffering decently like other people, she supposed he must expect to be much worse than other people; and that was all she had thought about it. But he had suffered such agonising pain in Calais, and had been ill after so different a fashion from anything she had seen

before, that she was very much alarmed, and began to feel quite bewildered by her solitude. The doctor was decisive about the impossibility of moving his patient for several days, under the most favourable circumstances, and Miriam entreated him to tell Mr. St. Quentin this. The invalid was much disconcerted, and declared his abhorrence of being at an hotel. He detested such places; he was sure he should never get better in one of them. He was told plainly that even a short journey by rail might, and probably would, kill him. Could it harm him to be removed from the hotel to lodgings, or a house, as short a distance off as such accommodation could be procured? That, the doctor said, might be possible, if he had a tolerably good night. It was then agreed between Miriam and the doctor that the best arrangement possible of this kind should be made on the following day, to pacify the

patient, though, the doctor thought it right to warn her, he did not anticipate that it would be advisable to allow Mr. St. Quentin to make even so much exertion.

Then, in her turn, Miriam employed the telegraph. She sent the following message to Walter:

"We are at the *Grand Hotel* at Dover. Mr. St. Quentin is dangerously ill. Can you come to me? I beg of you to come, if possible, by the first train to-morrow."

The closing in of the night around illness, suspense, and watching is always terrible, even in one's own home, with all the quiet, sympathy, and consideration which home implies. Miriam never forgot the closing in of the night in that strange place, with all the discomfort of an hotel, of strange faces, unsympathizing servants, and her own overwhelming fatigue. She was not old enough to do without sleep, or to endure broken

rest, and she had never felt so tired in her life. The rolling of the steamer was in her head, she was sick and giddy, but her mind was clear enough, and busy with her position and its future probablities. The disposition of their rooms, a sitting-room and two bed-rooms, all three communicating with each other, was fortunate. Mr. St. Quentin had been placed in the inner room, and the next was for Miriam. It was not until every preparation had been made for carrying out the doctor's instructions during the night, that Miriam had even the relief of changing her dress. She was looking ill and wan, and her face bore an expression of concentrated care and anxiety. Mr. St. Quentin was in an alarming state of pain and exhaustion for several hours, but then became much easier, and Miriam yielded to the persuasion of her maid, an Englishwoman, who had replaced Bianca, and permitted her to take the post

of watcher beside the sick man until the morning. Miriam was staggering with fatigue, and her fear of falling asleep and neglecting the patient decided her. She saw the valet before she left her husband's room, and instructed him to go out into the town on the following morning, and endeavour to procure apartments, or a furnished house, ready for immediate occupation. At length her aching head was laid upon her pillow, but it was long before she slept; her limbs twitched from fatigue; her restlessness was distressing, for she wanted to think, if she might not sleep.

This was, she felt sure, a crisis in her life. Not so much because she might be about to lose her husband, but because, whether he lived or died, it was plain to her he was going to decide her fate. He was about to make a will, and on that will must depend the solution of the question whether her

"great speculation," as in her thoughts she had bitterly called her marriage, was a failure or a success. If he did not secure to her by this will the continuance of the wealth she had enjoyed since her marriage, then she should have sacrificed her youth, her beauty, her conscience, incurred the degradation of a loveless marriage, and exposed herself to the malevolent ridicule of the world, for a few years of luxury and pleasure, just enough to unfit her for humbler things and simpler enjoyments. She was sorry for Mr. St. Quentin. She did not like to see him suffer; but there was no stronger feeling than natural compassion in this—no softening of the mistrustful anger with which she recalled his late conduct, and speculated on his present intentions. She had no reason to think that the sufferings he had undergone, or her assiduous attendance on him during these latter days, had had any influence on his

feelings towards her. He was tranquil and easy, but not sleeping, when she left his room, and she had said a few kind words, and taken his hand. But he had only muttered something inarticulate in reply, and drawn his hand coldly away. This had not hurt her; she cared nothing for him; but it had kept up the alarm she had never ceased to feel.

For a long time Miriam lay awake, hearing, through the open door, the occasional murmurs, moans, or impatient questions of the sick man, and the soothing answers of the watcher, or her quiet movements in the adjoining room; but at length, when the wintry dawn was not far off, she fell asleep, and awoke, reluctantly, only at the appointed hour, when her maid, looking pale and weary, came to rouse her.

Mr. St. Quentin had been very ill towards morning, but the pain had again yielded to

remedies, and he was quiet now. Miriam arose, put on a warm dressing-gown, and took her place beside him, dismissing her maid to rest.

"Do not come down until I send for you," she said. "If he refuses to have a nurse, I must get the doctor to speak to him, and persuade him."

The doctor came early, and was not encouraging. Mr. St. Quentin was greatly reduced in strength, and there was such debility about the action of the heart that the utmost care and quiet would be necessary. Miriam explained that Mr. St. Quentin was expecting a gentleman from London on business. Must he be refused admittance? The doctor looked embarrassed. It would certainly be better that he should have nothing to excite or agitate him; but still—— Did Mrs. St. Quentin know whether the business in question was important? Very import-

ant. It was to give instructions for his will. The doctor looked exceedingly grave. He was very sorry to find that his patient had so anxious and imperative a duty on his mind, but he could not, considering the immense importance of such business, and the extreme uncertainty which, he felt himself bound to acknowledge, attended Mr. St. Quentin's present state, absolutely prohibit the lawyer's visit. He would see Mr. St. Quentin again, when this trying ordeal had been gone through. He then left Miriam, deeply impressed by his gravity of look and manner, and in great perplexity.

She knew nothing about what her position would be, what her legal rights, if Mr. St. Quentin should die without having made a will, and she had every reason to believe, if he did make a will, it would be most unfavourable to her. What should she do? Was it in her power to do anything?

Mr. St. Quentin's valet had come to attend on his master, and was in the room when she returned to it. He was going out soon on the business with which she had charged him. A servant came to the door with a telegram.

"Bring that to me, Bolton," said Mr. St. Quentin.

It was from the firm of Ross and Raby, and informed Mr. St. Quentin that a confidential clerk would wait on him at noon on that day. Mr. St. Quentin then said he thought he could sleep for awhile, but gave orders, as emphatic as in his weak state he could make them, that the gentleman from Messrs. Ross and Raby was to be brought to him immediately on his arrival. He fell asleep very soon, and Miriam sat, hidden from him by the bed-curtains, listening now to his breathing, anon to the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, sometimes to the

wind and rain. She wondered there had been no message from Walter. Perhaps he would arrive at the same time with this lawyer from London; but it did not matter. Then she read the telegram again. The confidential clerk of Messrs. Ross and Raby was not coming direct from town—the message said "from Deal." No doubt he was already in the neighbourhood on business. She would look at the *Railway Guide*, to find out by what train Walter might arrive. The book was in the sitting-room, and she rose and passed through her own bedroom with a noiseless step, leaving the doors unclosed. She found the *Railway Guide*, and was looking over it, leaning on the table, when she heard steps in the corridor close to the door, and one of the hotel servants turned the handle gently, and looked in. Then he threw the door open and said: "Mrs. St. Quentin is here, sir."

Miriam turned her head, and saw Walter.

It was a strange meeting. They spoke hurriedly, cautiously, lest they should disturb the sleeper. Miriam could not close the doors, lest he should call for anything, for he was alone. They looked long in each other's face, and they both sighed. Miriam led her brother to the farthest extremity of the room, and seated herself beside him, encircled by his arms. How handsome he was looking, she thought, but so much older; and how strangely gray his hair was, almost as gray as Mr. St. Quentin's. Eager question, and answer as eager, soon placed Walter Clint in possession of the circumstances under which his sister had summoned him, and confirmed him in his general impression of Miriam's married life. Then she acknowledged what her purpose had been, until Mr. St. Quentin's illness had

prevented its accomplishment, and received from Walter a hasty assurance that she should come to him and Florence when she pleased. Miriam had so much to say to him, the immediate circumstances were so pressing, that she lost all sense of his long absence, and made no allusion to his adventures. Beyond the surprise of the first moment, and the sense of the alteration in the faces, present to the minds of both, there was no strangeness after a little while. Miriam told him that Mr. St. Quentin had as yet made no will, and that a lawyer was to arrive in little more than an hour's time to make one, and that she had reason to believe she should be left with only a bare pittance.

"How do you know?" asked Walter. "What horrible treachery and injustice!"

"I will tell you. I have seen some memoranda of his—they are there, in that desk—on the floor—at this moment, by which

it is evident he means——Hush! what's that? Did he call?"

She arose, went to the open folding-door, and stood listening. Mr. St. Quentin did not call, did not speak. After a minute of deep silence, she was moving back towards Walter again, when they both heard a distinct and peculiar sound. It was not articulate—it was like the noise, half clicking, half grating, which a clock makes an instant before it strikes. She stopped, and again stood perfectly still, then said: "It certainly comes from his room. I shall just look at him, and be back in a moment."

She went quickly, but quite noiselessly, Walter's eyes following her through the intervening bed-room; but, as she passed into her husband's room, she partially closed the folding-doors, and Walter lost sight of her.

There was no repetition of the sound. Miriam looked about. All was precisely as

she had left it. The sick man was lying huddled up, and with his head bent downwards, turned towards the wall. The rain splashed upon the windows, and the wind rumbled in the chimney. Miriam passed round the head of the bed with a light step, kneeled down on its other side, between the bed and the wall, to look closely at her husband, and found herself gazing into the fixed, senseless eyes, wide open, and upon the fallen ashy features of a dead face.

CHAPTER VII.

ONCE MORE A WAY OF ESCAPE.

NOT a scream, not a sound betrayed Miriam's awful discovery to the listener in the sitting-room. One heavy thump of her heart, one rush of blood into her head, and she remained kneeling, perfectly motionless on the floor between the bed and the wall, holding her temples tightly between her hands, and looking, with fixedness little less than their own, into those wide open eyes. In such moments there is no time; then, at least, the spirit escapes from its bonds. It might have been five minutes, it might have been as many hours,

for all that Miriam knew, that she knelt there, spellbound, her limbs heavy and cold, her head whirling, but not lost, not confused. It had come, then. Was this the worst that could have happened? This awful occurrence did not violently break the chain of her immediately previous thought; on the contrary, it continued and strengthened it. Was all lost, in this case, that had been in danger? Not a sentiment of grief, hardly a passing touch of pity, came to Miriam, as she knelt, during those few fearful minutes, by the side of the dead man. It was indeed "the hour and the power of darkness."

She arose with a slight shiver, and went to the mantelpiece. At that moment the timepiece chimed—eleven silvery strokes. And the lawyer was to arrive at noon. One hour only, if every other chance should cohere, for what she had to do. She locked the door which opened from Mr. St. Quen-

tin's bedroom upon the corridor, and having completely shut the folding-doors which communicated with her own room, she went back to her brother; but before she approached him, she looked out of the sitting-room door. No one was near; the corridor was quite empty; and she observed that there were no rooms precisely opposite theirs, only a staircase, and some large presses in the wall. As she came up to Walter, who was reading a newspaper, he said, "Is all right?" laid the paper aside, looked up at her, and sprang up.

"Good heavens, Miriam! what is the matter?"

A mirror on the wall showed her her ghastly face.

"Hush!" she said, and laid a strong hand upon him, forcing him back into his seat. "Don't speak above your breath. Be calm and collected, for my sake. *He is dead!*"

Walter shrank from her, and was silent in horror.

"Yes, he is dead! He has died without a struggle."

"Impossible! And we two here, so near him! Let me see!"

"No, Walter. I tell you it is true. Do you think I can be mistaken? I have been beside him, looking into his face ever since! You must not see him: you must not go near him; it is no question of *that* now; and you must be perfectly calm, and able to help me quickly. We have not an instant to spare."

The colour had utterly deserted her face, but her eyes were sparkling with intense eagerness and entreaty, and the fingers of her right hand held his shoulder like a vice.

"Help you! What do you mean? Had not we better call some one, and send for the doctor at once?"

"No, I tell you; no, no, no! What good can the doctor do to a dead man? Besides, he's coming presently. Oh, Walter, my brother, listen to me! I am young still, and all my future hangs upon this hour, and is in your hands! Oh, Walter, you don't know, you cannot know what my life has been, and how tremendous this blow is to me! You know what I married him for, Walter—to get away from home, and to be rich. He bribed me with such promises, and he tricked me basely! He persuaded me—for I was vain, and proud of my power over him—that he would dower me all the more splendidly that he did not bind himself to anything; and I believed him, though papa told me I was wrong. Wrong! I was a fool! And he has suspected and insulted me all these horrid years—yes, for though I have had plenty of money and plenty of pleasure, they have

been horrid years! And I am to lose it all!"

"But how do you know, Miriam?" asked her brother, who had been unable to interrupt her vehement appeal, all the more impressive and terrible that she never raised her voice, or loosened her grasp on him. "And what can be done?"

"I know, I know!" she resumed. "I have watched him, in one sense, while he watched me in another. He has been in correspondence with a man in America. I don't know his name, and I don't know what about, but I can guess; and he meant to leave all his property away from me."

"What relatives are there? How is his property circumstanced?"

"I don't know; I only know that it is very large, and mostly in Indian securities. He has no relatives; I am sure of that. He often told me he had no claims on him, abso-

lutely none; and it was only out of spite to me he would have left his money to a man he never saw."

"How do you know that?"

"I don't *know* it, perhaps—at least, he never actually told me so in as many words—but I am morally certain of it. He has repeated to me, over and over again, that no one in the world had any claim on him; and this correspondence shows it is no one in England he has been looking after. In a moment, Walter, I will prove to you that I am right." She glided away from him, crossed the adjoining room, and, with just an instant's hesitation, passed through the folding doors which hid the bed and its awful tenant from his sight. In another minute, she returned, carrying a key. The travelling-desk she had pointed out to Walter lay on the floor. She opened it, took out a few papers—mere slips of memoranda

—and knelt by Walter's side, showing them to him. "Here are the proofs of his treachery to me. Read this:

"*C—— advises English lawyer. Mem., to look out for a good firm. In last letter from D——, return of L—— D—— was promised, on receipt of fee and specific statement of intentions.*"

"And read this, written at Calais—written only three days ago, when he was so ill, and yet determined to cross, because he was in such haste to be cruel and treacherous to me. I do believe he felt that he was dying, and that his great fear was lest the villainy should not be accomplished.

"*Mem., shortest form of will for present use. The whole of my property, of whatsoever kind, all invested moneys, furniture, plate, horses, carriages, to L—— D——, with the exception of an annuity to Mrs. St. Q—— of*

two hundred pounds, to be paid by L—— D——, and secured by him to her, on his taking possession of my property, in any way he thinks proper. Sole executor, L—— D——."

On a third slip of paper was the name and address of the firm of Messrs. Ross and Raby, solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn.

"This is horrible indeed, my poor darling!" said Walter, looking forlornly at the memoranda; "but it is a comfort to think he has not carried out this intention; and though you may have some trouble, you must be well off. The law makes a secure provision for a widow under such circumstances, and in this case there seems to be no heir."

"No heir, Walter! Who is L—— D——, do you suppose? Of course he is the heir, the heir-at-law, the man who would have come in for Mr. St Quentin's money,

if he had made no will at all—the man in America. I am sure of it—he never had a friend he would have neglected all those years, and then suddenly taken to looking after. And I am to lose all, or nearly all, and to bear the disgrace, the humiliation of this, for *him*, for a stranger! What right has he to come in, and rob me of the wealth for which I have paid so heavy and horrid a price? No one knows of these memoranda. This C—— he mentions must be the man who came to see him in Paris so often lately; a sly, sleek, horrid man he was: C—— stands for Caux, of course. He had done no business for him, it is plain. He tells him to employ an English lawyer to rob me—and in his hurry to act on this advice, he has died before he could accomplish such wickedness. Caux has drawn no will for him, there is no will! Walter!"—she rose from her knees, and clasped him

round the neck, hiding her face from him, as she spoke with passionate rapidity, close to his ear—"you will not let *any* of this villainy be done to me; you will save me from the bitterness of all this misery without any reward; you will remember how you trusted me with Florence, and how I deserved the trust! Won't you, Walter?"

"I will—I do," he said, trying to see her face; but she held him closer, and spoke lower and more rapidly. "But what can I do, Miriam? I don't know what you have in your mind."

"And time is flying," she murmured. "I will tell you." She lifted her head, and looked at him straight and unabashed. "At twelve o'clock a clerk of Messrs. Ross and Raby's will be here, in obedience to a message from—him—to take instructions for a will. This man has never seen him; no servant in the house has seen him. He was

carried here from the boat yesterday, with his face covered; and except our servants —one is out, the other is asleep—no one has seen it. Walter! in the old days, in which I always helped you and loved you, and was staunch to you, no matter how much I was reviled or punished on your account—in those old days, I say, you were a good actor; you could dress, and speak, and look a part well, and there was no handwriting you could not imitate, besides writing several hands of your own. Remember the letters Rose Dixon brought to Crescent House. Have you lost your old skill, and your hand its former cunning?"

"Good God! Miriam—do you propose—"

"That is what I propose, brother; it is quite safe, and it injures no one—remember how he would have injured *me*." She held him now, with a hand griping each shoulder, and looked at him full, with her command-

ing, gloomy eyes. "When this lawyer comes, he shall be introduced to you, instead of his real client—the firm know nothing of *him*, not even his handwriting; it was his valet who wrote the letter to them—not even whether he is young or old; but you can easily look much older than you do now, and the light need not be strong; and you shall give him instructions to draw a will—you have the model; it is easy and simple; it is only a few lines; it will all be done in a few minutes—and two of the hotel-servants, who have not seen—him—can witness it. The lawyer will go away, and then you, and then the truth shall be told. No one will be wronged, Walter. This unknown man knows nothing of his chance, and never can have expected such a chance to arise; and I—I shall have the reward, the bare pay, I may call it, for all this horrid life, which is done with, and

I shall owe it all to you—to you, Walter, who owe so much to me!"

"Miriam, this is madness. Do you know what you want me to do? This is a felony."

"And felony is *a word!* What has *he* done *to me?* What would he have done if he had lived two more hours? Think of that, Walter, and of the base treachery it means; and think of your own happy home, of Florence, of the child that is coming, and of all *you* have, while I have nothing; if the law gives me anything, I must have it with the sting of suspicion, of calumny—and do this thing for me, dearest Walter, for your sister, who has done and borne much for you! *I* did not need praying, Walter, when you came to me, in disgrace, and asked me to do that for you, for which my father would have turned me out into the streets, if he had discovered it! I needed no prayers, and I never faltered, not then,

not after, when this old man heaped insult and suspicion on me, for Florence's sake!"

"But, Miriam——" He hesitated, covered his face with his hands.

"Time flies," she said. "Walter, will you not help and save me? Will *you* be cruel and selfish, and treacherous too?"

There was a moment's silence, then Walter, disclosing a face as white and troubled as her own, said:

"Show me how it is to be done, and I will do it. Let what will come of it, Miriam, I will do this for you!"

She kissed him without a word. Then, with inconceivable rapidity and quietness, she placed writing materials before him, and collected several books which lay about the room, travelling literature from book-stalls, and French *brochures*, and opened them in a row, at the top of the blotting-book—displaying the fly-leaf of each. A formal in-

scription was written exactly in the middle of every one of these. Then she went to the desk again, and took out a cheque-book, in which were a number of blank cheques, signed. In all these signatures and inscriptions there was hardly a trace of variation in the characters, forming this name:

LUCIUS CLIBBORN ST. QUENTIN.

"Copy these," she said. "It is an easy hand, the most formal I ever saw. And read the memoranda again. I will be with you immediately." She instantly withdrew, and Walter bent over his task. She went into the room in which the old man lay dead, and collected, from the dressing-table and the chairs, several articles of his clothing, and such dressing things as had been unpacked last night, and carried them into the adjoining room. In a moment she swept away her own toilet apparatus, the gown,

bonnet, and wraps she travelled in, and every trace of a feminine presence in the room, locked them into a wardrobe, and replaced them by the things belonging to Mr. St. Quentin. Then she pulled the blinds down, and partially drew the bed-curtains, arranging them so as to interpose between an occupant of the bed and the view of any person in the sitting-room. Her movements were wonderfully swift, but her thoughts far outstripped them. In those few minutes, which defied her reckoning, every detail of the scheme she had conceived—who can tell within what an indefinable instant after her eyes had met the dead eyes—had presented itself to her. Two supreme points of vantage were hers; she only knew that anything had occurred within these rooms, and no one had a right to enter them, unbidden by her. She might even keep the lawyer's clerk waiting, if it should be necessary; she was

not absolutely tied to time. She was not insensible to the danger of the deed she meditated, but she fairly balanced the chances, and they were heavily in her favour. There was in the disposition of the rooms, only one slight risk. Supposing the servants who were to be summoned to witness the will should, in relating the circumstance to their fellows, mention, in the hearing of the housemaid who had attended them, that Mr. St Quentin was in the outer room? It was a risk, but only a little one, and when it came into Miriam's mind, she dismissed it. The chances were very much against such a risk occurring, and she *must* trust something to chance.

A knock at the locked door of the room in which the dead man lay! Miriam heard, and replied to it instantly by turning the key, and confronting with a warning gesture the person who knocked. It was Bolton

the valet. She stepped into the corridor, and softly shut the door.

"I thought I should have found Mrs. Haines here, ma'am," he said, "as they told me Mr. Clint had come."

"Haines is asleep, I hope," said Miriam. "What is it?"

Then Bolton explained. He had not found a house or lodgings in the vicinity of the hotel, but had heard of a house about two miles away, on the coast. Should he go and look at it, or would Mrs. St. Quentin think it too far away? If his master could be got into a carriage and moved at all, that distance would make no practical difference. Miriam assented, and felt, with a thrill in her veins, that here was another point in her favour. The lawyer might propose to employ Mr. St. Quentin's own servant, rather than a stranger, for the purpose of witnessing his will, and here was

the valet himself proposing what must take him out of the way, without any premeditation on her part. She told Bolton that she entirely agreed with him, and begged he would go and see the house at once, and inspect it very carefully. The man was turning away, and she about to open the door, when he said: "I beg your pardon, ma'am. I suppose there is no change?"

"No," replied Miriam; "there is no change."

Once more she went into her own bedroom, and looked carefully round. All was in the disorder proper to a man's room; she had but to add the order which should attend illness. She was getting used to what she was doing now, and the tenacity of her will stilled her nerves. Without a tremor, she carried the medicine-bottles and glasses, the cups and the flannels, all the sad, significant *appareil*, away from the dead man's

bedside, and arranged them in a corresponding place in the outer room. Only a few minutes had been consumed in these rapid arrangements, and while she was making them, Miriam's gaze was constantly turned upon Walter, sitting with his back towards the open folding-doors, now writing busily, now thinking, his head resting on his hands. At length she went to him. A sheet of paper, on which the formal inscription on the fly-leaves before him was accurately copied several times, lay on the blotting-book. Miriam put her arm round his neck, leaned over his shoulder, and studied the lines of writing minutely.

"Perfect!" was the one word she said. Then she shut the books, threw them into a corner, twisted up the sheet on which Walter had been writing, put it into the fire, where it was instantly consumed; and, turning to Walter, took him by the arm,

saying, "Come. In ten minutes this man will be here."

She led him into the adjoining bedroom, gave him an embroidered dressing-gown of some soft Indian stuff, and a crimson silk night-cap, which she pulled over his forehead, leaving only a ring of his prematurely gray hair showing beneath its border, once more kissed him, said, "Call me when you are ready, and be quick!" and returning to the sitting-room, stood near the door, white, rigid, listening.

In a few minutes Walter called her, softly, and she went to him. His appearance took her by surprise, justly as she had calculated upon his powers of representation. In the bed, in a judicious half-light, lay an old man, propped up with pillows, which yet seemed to give him no support sufficient to counteract the exhaustion which pulled him down from off them; his shrunken figure seemed

lost in the folds of the Indian dressing-gown, whose embroidered sleeves hung over the large, hirsute hands, which certainly had no appearance of strength. Again she said one word—"Perfect!" and placed a chair near the bed, with a little table beside it, on which were writing materials and a hand-bell. Then an idea struck her; she flitted back into the sitting-room, and brought one of the railway-books, with the formal inscription on the fly-leaf. There was no reason why it should not lie, open, among the medicine-bottles, left there by the sick man's attendant, and within reach of the sick man's eye. He noted this approvingly, but said nothing. Then, as a step sounded in the corridor, Miriam waved her hand to him, and the next instant had flung herself into an arm-chair beside the fire in the adjoining room, having closed the folding-doors as she passed. She was looking ill and worn,

wan with anxiety and fatigue; her hair was in disorder, pushed back from her white face anyhow, but this was all as it should be. She leaned back in her chair, and closed her eyes, as she replied to a knock at the door: "Come in."

It was a waiter, followed by a short, fat, bald-headed gentleman, whom he announced as "Mr. Clissold."

CHAPTER VIII.

ONCE MORE RISKING IT.

"YOU are the gentleman from Messrs. Ross and Raby, whom Mr. St. Quentin is expecting, I think?" said Miriam, as Mr. Clissold made her a formal bow. Her first glance at the confidential clerk was re-assuring. The sole expression of him, in physiognomy and figure, was stolidity. There was no reason to fear his penetrating observation on her appearance, dress, or demeanour. His dull protuberant eyes rested on her without seeming to see her, and not a muscle in his red face moved. If he had found her weeping violently, or

practising the last valse step, attired in the brown robe of a Carmelite nun, or arrayed in the tulle and spangles of an opera-dancer, it would have been all the same to Mr. Clissold. He was not sent to *see her*, and in any business, and therefore solely recognisable sense, he did not see her.

"Yes, ma'am," was his reply.

"I am sorry to say Mr. St. Quentin is very ill. I will inform him that you are here."

"Thank you, ma'am. Clissold, of Ross and Raby's."

"Will you take a seat for a few minutes?" she said, indicating a chair. He complied, without the least change of expression; and Miriam went into the bedroom.

"He has come," she whispered, bending low towards Walter. "I don't think there's any risk. If he is like what he looks, he is a mere machine."

"Send him in," said Walter; and his sister, in the midst of her strongly restrained excitement and terrible suspense, was conscious that he had some sense of amusement in the playing of his dangerous part.

"Will you have the goodness to come into Mr. St. Quentin's room?" said Miriam to Mr. Clissold, who was sitting upright on his chair, slowly knocking the edges of the soles of his boots together, and neatly fitting the tips of his thumbs and forefingers into a heart-shaped pattern. "I must beg of you to cut this business matter, whatever it may be, as short as possible. He is quite unfit for business, indeed."

"That," replied Mr. Clissold, standing up all of a piece, and looking straight before him, "is for Mr. St. Quentin to decide. I am only sent to receive his instructions."

Under other circumstances, Miriam would have said "Brute!" in her own mind, but this

particular kind of density served her purpose just then; so she said nothing, but preceded Mr. Clissold into the presence of his client.

"This is Mr. Clissold," she said softly. "I will leave him with you, and shall be in the next room if you want me.—Take this chair, if you please."

There was no questioning, no speculation in the look which Mr. Clissold bestowed upon the client of Messrs. Ross and Raby, as he complied. He placed his feet in convenient contiguity for tapping, and arranged his finger and thumb tips into a heart-shaped pattern, while he waited for the sick man to enter upon the business for which he had been sent to Dover.

Miriam returned to the arm-chair by the fireside, and tried to remain still; but she could not. On the whole, her nerves were wonderfully under her control, but just so far they rebelled. She could almost forget

what was actually being done, at least she could force herself to a mechanical thinking of something else, while the great fact was there, unconfessed. And she could rely upon herself to go through with all that must come after, until she should have peace and the full reward; but she could not keep her limbs still. If they were not in motion they must tremble. So she rose, and paced the room from end to end, but her footstep made no sound. There was a hard and constant ticking in her throat, and her lips were dry. Twice she stopped beside a table where there were water and glasses, and drank water, but still her lips and throat were parched. Sometimes she could hear the harsh monotone of Mr. Clissold's business-like voice, but the sound of the client's never reached her.

After some time, the hand-bell was struck, and Miriam answered the summons.

Mr. Clissold was writing at the little table. The client was lying back upon the pillows, seemingly much exhausted; and the light in the room was dim, an hour after midday. Great gusts of wind and rain swept round the house with a hoarse, moaning sound.

"Do you want anything?" asked Miriam of the client, who signed to Mr. Clissold to reply, and turned his head aside, breathing hurriedly.

"We shall require two persons to witness Mr. St. Quentin's signature to a certain document, ma'am," said the confidential clerk, in a tone as unmoved and unintelligent as though he had not the smallest notion of the contents of the document then under his hand.

"Very well," said Miriam. "Shall I do for one?"

"Well—no—ma'am; you won't," an-

swered the confidential clerk deliberately.

"I will send two servants, then," said Miriam; and turning to the sick man, she said gently:

"I suppose you would have preferred Bolton, but, unfortunately, he has gone out, and will not be in for some time. Shall I send two of the hotel servants to you?"

"Yes, yes," said the client faintly, with the impatience of an invalid about answering questions.

Miriam rang the bell, and when the waiter came, she told him what was wanted. Would he and one of his fellow-servants witness a signature for Mr. St. Quentin? The man assented respectfully. One of the waiters was passing at that moment, and he called him in. He hoped the gentleman was better; they had understood that Dr. Ashley did say he was very poorly indeed. Miriam answered the civil inquiry with a

quivering lip, and the two men went into the bedroom.

Then came a few minutes, which she felt she could not outlive twice; and the two waiters came out. They looked grave and important, and evidently regarded her with compassionate curiosity.

"The gentleman is very bad, sure*ly*," said the older man—a model of respectability, who wore shoes cut so low that it was a wonder he could keep them on. "If you please, ma'am, are there any orders for dinner?"

Miriam managed to give some orders; and the men, wholly unsuspicious, left the room, and exchanged confidences, in the corridor, to the effect that "he" was a deal too old for "her;" that she was surprising cut up about it; and that she wouldn't find no difficulty in providing herself with No. 2, for she was uncommon nice-looking. Also,

that they didn't care how many old parties made their wills at the *Grand*, and asked them to witness them, if all the lawyers had orders to stand a sovereign apiece, like this one, which he was to have his lunch in the coffee-room, immediate, because he was going up by the express.

Miriam resumed her restless walk, and presently Mr. Clissold appeared, coming through the folding-doors. There was perhaps a shade more deference perceptible in his demeanour towards her, as if he discerned in her a future client of importance to that Ross and Raby in whose interests all his wooden being was merged. Again he made her a formal bow, as she stood still, facing him.

"Is your business completed, sir?" she asked.

"It is, madam," he replied, buttoning his tight coat, and making the presence of a

thick paper in his breast-pocket evident by the process—"satisfactorily so. I wish you good morning, ma'am, and leave my best wishes—and those of Messrs. Ross and Raby—for Mr. St. Quentin's speedy recovery." So saying, he went down to his luncheon in the coffee-room, before leaving for London by the express.

"Get up, Walter, quick," said Miriam; "the doctor will be here immediately, and Bolton coming back, and I cannot keep my maid upstairs much longer."

Miriam went into the room to him, saying all this in a burst of nervous hurry, which Walter understood as well as she did; but he did not second it. He was weak, worn out, and unable to congratulate himself or her on the wonderful success they had achieved. He had but one wish—to get away; and Miriam saw it. She smothered the pang the consciousness cost her; she

thrust back the impulse which would have led her to thank him effusively, and to pour out all the complicated feelings which were in her heart. "Not yet," she thought; "that will be for another time. There is too much to be borne and done now, before I can realise that I am free, independent, rich, and safe."

Walter dressed himself rapidly, and then drank a good deal of wine, while Miriam restored the rooms to their former appearance. This was harder work than the task of their first arrangement. Through all her exultation, all her elation, and the triumph of her success, the over-wrought nerves were beginning to make themselves felt; and when she passed into the dead man's awful presence, to replace the clothes he had worn but yesterday, and the golden gewgaws of his toilet, an irrepressible shudder shook her. Was there any change in the face?

Then she remembered, with a start, to have heard that the eyes of the dead should be closed soon after the life has left them, or they will refuse to close. What if those wide open eyes should remain wide open in the coffin, and under the close-packed clay? Miriam knew she must get the remainder of her task done quickly, when such fancies as these were beginning to scare her. He had lain there too long untouched; it was time he were streaked and straightened for the grave. She did not look towards the corpse, but rapidly gave the room the appearance it had worn when her maid had quitted it, poured the portion of the medicine, which should have been administered had the patient lived to take it, into the fire, and rejoined Walter. He did not look up as she came in, and he spoke without raising his eyes.

"Well, Miriam, this is done. Mr. Clis-

sold has taken the will with him to London. It is a terrible thing, but I suppose it will be all right."

"I am sure it will be all right, dearest Walter," said she, in her softest tones of persuasion: "it is bare justice to me; things are different according to circumstances. But we must not talk now. Don't you think, Walter," she continued, suggesting the very thing her instinct told her he wished, but did not care to say he wished, "it would be well for you to go away at once? In all that I have to attend to now, I feel I shall be better alone. You had better get away on foot out of this town; so that, if it be proposed to send for you, you may not be found. The rain has ceased, and the wind is going down. You shall hear from me to-morrow."

She brought him his coat and hat, and hurried him away. He hardly spoke, but

held her tightly in his arms for awhile. Then he left her, and it chanced that he did not meet any one on the stair-case; but the porter was opening the front-door to give egress to a gentleman just as Walter set foot in the hall. He paused, and waited until this gentleman had descended the steps, and turned away; and then, having leisurely inspected the state of the barometer, he too went out, and turned in the opposite direction. The gentleman was Mr. Clissold, who, as Walter correctly guessed, had taken the road to the railway station.

"I hope you have had a good sleep, Haines?" said Miriam to her maid, whom she had summoned immediately on Walter's departure.

"Yes, ma'am; I am quite rested."

"I am exceedingly tired; and as Mr. St. Quentin is still sleeping—has been sleeping, indeed, these two hours—you shall arrange

my hair, and then take my place beside him, while I rest a little, until the doctor comes."

"Mr. St. Quentin has had no return of the pain?"

"No return."

Miriam sat patiently while Mrs. Haines brushed her hair, put it away in smooth braids, and changed her dress. She even spoke a little, in a low voice, about the business on which Bolton had gone out, and how much longer it was likely to detain him. Then she lay down on a sofa in her bedroom; and Mrs. Haines, having made up the fire, and inspected the medicine-bottles, seated herself behind the bed-curtain, in awful unconscious proximity to the dead man.

During several minutes of agonising endurance, Miriam lay still, her arm thrown across her eyes, waiting for the scream with

which she expected Mrs. Haines to announce the discovery she must soon make. A few minutes of profound silence elapsed, and then Miriam's ear detected the slight rustling of the woman's dress, and strained itself to follow every movement. If the discovery did not come soon, she should not have strength to hold out; a dull sickly sense of faintness was stealing over her even now, and the palms of her hands were cold and clammy. The next sound was the click of curtain-rings, as the intervening curtain was cautiously withdrawn by the watcher, alarmed by the stillness. Miriam heard the slight creaking of the bedstead as she leaned over the huddled-up figure, with its back towards her, leaned further yet, heard her step behind the head of the bed, and the whisk of her gown against the wall—followed in her imagination the close, rapid examination which ensued—heard her say,

with a gasp, "My God!" and, feeling her approach, shut her eyes firmly, and threw her head back in a perfect imitation of sleep. In a moment, the woman was beside her, shaking her gently by the shoulder. Miriam roused herself, and sat up, meeting her maid's pale, scared face with a start.

"Oh, madam!—I—I fear something dreadful has happened! I—I was frightened at not hearing Mr. St. Quentin breathe, and I went round to look at him, and, indeed, ma'am, it's no use deceiving you, he is gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yes, ma'am. Come and look at him yourself."

Miriam stood up in a blind, uncertain sort of way, catching at the woman's gown; and at that moment, the sitting-room door opened, and Dr. Ashley appeared. Mrs. Haines called to him loudly, and he came

quickly into the bed-room; but before he could reach her side, or ask an explanation of the looks of the two women, Miriam's hold of her maid relaxed, and she fell in a heap upon the floor.

Ten minutes later, and just as the express train was about to start, a railway official, accompanied by the waiter who had announced Walter's arrival to his sister, ran along the platform, looking into the carriages, and crying out—"Any gentleman of the name of Clint here?" No gentleman answered the appeal; and the train puffed its way out of the station, leaving the official and the waiter looking disconcerted. "He ain't there," said the latter; "I should have known him in a moment." They turned away, talking of the event which had occurred at the *Grand;* and Mr. Clissold, undisturbed by the commotion, went on his prosperous way to London, the bearer of an

extension of business to Ross and Raby.

Everything was done most decorously, and in perfect order. After the terrible shock Mrs. St. Quentin had received, Dr. Ashley regarded absolute quiet as indispensable. In Mrs. Haines he found a sensible woman, who did as she was told, and was not over-excited by other people's affairs. Miriam was removed to another floor of the hotel, as soon as she recovered from the merciful fainting-fit which had divided the general attention between the dead and the living, and all the necessary steps were immediately taken. The doctor could not say the lamentable event had exactly surprised him ; he had considered Mr. St. Quentin's condition highly precarious, as he had told Mrs. St. Quentin, and he had no doubt the immediate cause of death was exhaustion consequent upon Mr. St. Quentin's having travelled when in an unfit state.

He was very kind to Miriam, and ready to be useful to her in every way, and he admired the clear-headedness and self-control with which she gave her directions, when bodily weakness had passed away. He communicated, by her desire, with Messrs. Ross and Raby, informing them of Mr. St. Quentin's decease, and requesting them to act for her in a professional capacity. He also wrote to Walter Clint, requesting him to come to Dover.

The reply to this letter was written by Florence, and addressed to Miriam. It was constrained, but Miriam knew that was inevitable. Florence's mind would be disturbed by her knowledge of the truth respecting the marriage thus suddenly terminated, and the sense of what that termination ought to be to the young widow. So she said very little on that point, but told Miriam that Walter could not come to her.

He had returned from his brief visit to Dover in a highly nervous state, and with a heavy, feverish cold, which had since increased, and rendered his leaving the house impossible. If Miriam wished it, Florence would come to her.

"And leave her darling husband ill! and travel here, to be with me under such circumstances, in her condition, poor child! No; certainly not," said Miriam, who knew in her heart that the last thing she wished for now was Walter's presence, and the last thing but one the presence of Walter's wife. So she wrote to her sister-in-law that she had found friends, and all the help she needed, and she would not have her come on any account. When everything was settled, she would pay them a long visit at the Firs, but it might be a little time first, as she was Mr. St. Quentin's sole executor, as well as his sole heir; and as the bulk of his

papers were in Paris, she might have to return thither direct—that would depend upon the counsel of her legal advisers; "besides which," she added, "dearest Florence, I feel, though I cannot explain it, that, for the present, it is best I should be quite alone."

Not a difficulty presented itself to Miriam. Messrs. Ross and Raby conducted her affairs with promptitude and ease. All the customary announcements succeeded that of Mr. St. Quentin's death. No creditors presented themselves—not a claim of any kind was made. Mr. St. Quentin's property was in order so admirable as to be incomprehensible to the legal mind, considering he had never, until literally the day of his death, employed a lawyer. Miriam had no difficulty in ascertaining, from his few perfectly-arranged papers, the exact amount and

distribution of the wealth to which she had succeeded. In her capacity of executor, she examined all Mr. St. Quentin's correspondence. It was not voluminous, and it was exceedingly uninteresting. If she still felt any of the curiosity respecting his former life, and his first wife, which she had once expressed to Florence, it was destined to remain ungratified. There was not a letter, not a memorandum, relating to it; the only memento of the past which she found among Mr. St. Quentin's possessions was a miniature-portrait, in a drawer of an Indian desk he carried about with him, but never used. It represented a fresh, beautiful face, with gray eyes, black hair, and a fine complexion. Miriam had never heard a personal description of the first Mrs. St. Quentin, but she took it for granted the portrait was hers.

One word was engraved upon the oval frame—KATE.

CHAPTER IX.

HALCYON DAYS.

THE condition of a young, handsome, and rich widow has been pronounced by some cynical writers to be a very enviable one; and certainly, when the husband, who has had to die in order to bring about that pleasant state of things, has not been beloved, there is a good deal to say on that side of the question.

Miriam St. Quentin was young, handsome, rich, and a widow. Was she happy in her emancipation and her wealth? "The world"—as the few people who know anything about one call themselves, and as we

call them—would have been shocked just at first if it had been said that she was. It had really been such a model marriage, and Mr. St. Quentin such a dear old man, she must feel it very much! Miriam's demeanour as a widow was no less commendable than her conduct as a wife. The period of seclusion which custom and her own good taste assigned to her would not more than suffice for the planning and organising of her future life. She still believed in such possibilities. A plan formed in haste had succeeded so thoroughly for her, that she was convinced she had only to set about the construction of an elaborate scheme, at leisure, to be equally secure of its realization. If there was any point on which her mind was thoroughly made up, it was that she had done no moral wrong. She knew she had broken human laws; but they are not infallible, and their intention is the pre-

vention and the redress of injury, injustice, and cruelty. They cannot take account of every vagary and contrariety of circumstance, and modify themselves accordingly. Mr. St. Quentin had meditated a great injury, injustice, and cruelty to her, and she had prevented his carrying out that intention; against the law, indeed, because its formula was not with her, but not against its spirit, which is that of fairness and honesty.

She would do a great deal of good with her money. That intention figured largely in her plan. Among her vague notions of religion was an idea that God Almighty demands a tithe of all the possessions of the rich for His poor, and that penalties would be found, at the great settling of accounts, to attach to the neglect of this obligation. She would not neglect it, but fulfil it to the letter, and then go beyond it, into the

spiritual realm of charity, including personal ministration and active sympathy. Miriam had no idea of restitution or reparation in all this; she genuinely believed in her own right; but charity was a use for wealth which was very pleasant to her. She had always helped the poor largely from her private resources, but she had never known Mr. St. Quentin to do so. Well, this should all be changed. There should be a fixed system, and then a liberal margin.

Of course Miriam made up her mind that she would not marry again. All young widows form this resolution. Either the lost happiness is never to be replaced, or the memory of it impaired, or the new and delicious freedom is never to be sacrificed to another venturesome risk: this is according to former circumstances. But Miriam had another reason, in addition to the second of these two, for arriving at this resolution.

Henceforth there must be a secret in her life; not burdensome to her, indeed, justified by her own knowledge, but to be known only to herself and Walter. No third person must ever share it. If she were to permit herself to love any man—and she would now marry only in obedience to that unknown sentiment and impulse—she must impart that secret. Instinct told her this would be impossible. You see, Miriam had as yet learned only elementary lessons from life, and she was still applying the line and the plummet to an edifice of which Fate was to be the real arbitrary builder, while she was to look on, helpless and amazed.

She was not an absolute unbeliever in love; she was too sensible to slip into any cynical jargon on the subject. She knew that love existed, and formed the great principle, motive, and reward of many

human lives. As a passion, she had little comprehension of it, and no esteem for it; but as a strong and abiding sentiment she regarded it with admiring respect. But Miriam knew that one "could not have everything in this world," according to the trite, wise old saying, and she thought, on the whole, one might do very well without love. Her marriage had not been unhappy for want of love; she was quite sure she should never have missed *that*, or thought about it at all, if other drawbacks had not existed. And so, without undervaluing it in the least, she quietly put it aside, out of her calculations, in the scheme she was constructing for the future.

Miriam intended to have a house in London. She would retain the apartment in Paris, and divide her time pretty equally between the two capitals. She had not acquired a taste for rurality, and she was

tired of travelling about the Continent of Europe. Far off, in the recesses of her fancy, there lurked visions of more extended travel, when she should break conventional bounds, and see the ancient wonders of the earth in the East, and the modern achievements of science in the West; but these projects were in the far future. She had to set her new life going, to surround herself with fresh interests and duties, and make for herself a place in the sort of society to which she chose to belong. In visits—which she did not, somehow, contemplate as very frequent or much prolonged—to the Firs she should find quite as much English country-life as she cared for. In occasionally sharing the home of Florence, Walter, and their prospective children—there was only one baby at the Firs as yet—she should have enough of the domesticities to preserve her from unwomanly callousness and isolation.

Miriam had passed four months in Paris, after her return thither subsequent to Mr. St. Quentin's death. During two months of the four, she was not alone. Miss Monitor had realised the dream of many years of dreary drudgery in the providing of young ladies with every accomplishment under the sun. She had made enough money to retire from the occupation which many good people, whose destiny has not obliged them to keep schools, consider so very ennobling. If the honest collected testimony of schoolmistresses could be procured, the result would probably be found to be the very reverse, and these often excellent women would acknowledge that nothing is so conducive to a sordid turn of mind and a general attitude of insincerity.

Miss Monitor was perfectly honest about it all. She was not only unfeignedly delighted to have the cottage and the cow—

for which she had longed as persistently as Warren Hastings longed for Daylesford—but enchanted to have done with the occupation itself. She had never liked "girls;" she inclined to believe nobody ever did like them, except their own mothers, and that in moderation, and she was frankly thankful to have done with them for evermore.

"Talk of breaking-ups and holidays, my dear!" she said to Miriam: "what was their escape *to mine?* I'm sure it was a glimpse of heaven to feel the house so silent and so empty, and to see the box-room rid of their trunks! It didn't last, though; there was the cleaning-up for them to come back, almost as soon as I had got it well into my mind that they were gone."

It was a great treat for Miss Monitor to go to Paris in the clear early Spring-time, and to be shown everything, except the theatres and "company," as she called it, by

Miriam. She did not object to the exceptions; the theatres would have horrified, and French "company" have puzzled her; and Miriam was exquisitely kind to her good friend. To think of her having ever been afraid of Miss Monitor, and having regarded her as an emporium of mysterious learning! —Miss Monitor, who, in reality, was the simplest-minded of women, though knowing in her own former department—and in comparison with whom Miriam was a perfect sage in knowledge of the world. Now that no ulterior educational object was included in her visits, Miss Monitor enjoyed the museums, the buildings, the picture-galleries, the historic monuments, with a delicious intensity; and the long drives in Miriam's luxurious carriage, when, well wrapped up in furs, and regardless of time and temperature, the friends visited all the environs of Paris, were especially delightful to her.

There was only one particular in which Miriam did not fulfil Miss Monitor's expectations; she never talked of her late husband, that most gentlemanly and admirable person, who had always been to Miss Monitor the *beau-ideal* of all that one could wish a husband to be—who was, well, just a little older than might have been desired. She would have liked to hear "all the particulars;" but Miriam did not indulge her with any. With this one exception, Miss Monitor's visit to Paris had been a perfect success. It was within a few days of its close now, and Miriam was thinking, with reluctance, which she did not closely analyse, that she ought to accompany her friend back to London, and make her long-deferred visit to the Firs.

Miss Monitor's cottage and cow were at Blackheath, and their proud proprietor was most anxious that Miriam should visit her

and behold her in all the glory of possession. Miriam was tempted to accede to her request; the cottage would furnish a sufficiently retired base of operations for her, whence she might proceed to select her own house in London, conveniently communicate with Messrs. Ross and Raby, and *when she must*, go on to the Firs.

When she must! Had it come to this with Miriam, and had she never asked herself why, and how? She had been wildly anxious to see her brother, and be with him; she had been prepared to make his conduct respecting Walter the subject of a quarrel between herself and her late husband, involving consequences which she could not calculate; and now she had an indescribable, unconquerable shrinking from the idea of seeing Walter, a shrinking which extended to Florence. Why was this? Why should she contemplate calmly—when-

ever she was driven to the contemplation of it at all, more rarely as the time went by—the deed in which they had been accomplices, and yet be unable to contemplate calmly the prospect of being brought into daily contact with Walter? Why, above all, should she shrink from seeing Florence? Miriam could not quite shut out those questions; they would ask themselves of her; but she dismissed them with a shrug of her shoulders, and that ready, convenient word of explanation, "Nervous!"

On a bright day, one of the latest in March, as crisp, as clear, as cold as that day, months ago, of which she is in some unaccountable way reminded, Miriam is in her boudoir, with the conservatory at the end, where the fountain is shedding its tinkling tears into the alabaster basin, and the bright-winged birds are fluttering and cooing behind the silvery wires of the aviary.

A brisk wood-fire is burning upon the hearth, and Miriam's writing-table is drawn close to the fireplace. She has been very busy this morning. In anticipation of her absence from Paris—for she has made up her mind to go to England with Miss Monitor—she has been looking into her affairs, and setting aside sundry sums of money for various charitable purposes. Her table is covered with account-books and papers, but it is very orderly for all that; and a row of little piles of napoleons and five-franc pieces is ranged at her left-hand. These are to be given to her almoners, two Sisters of St. Vincent of Paul, who visit the poor and sick in her neighbourhood, and who will come presently to receive this liberal contribution.

Miriam looks very handsome in her widow's dress, which has none of the eccentricities and exaggerations of the modern fashion in "weeds." Her bright hair is

smoothly banded under the crimped borders of her cap; and her large limpid golden eyes and broad low white brow are dignified, and lent an additional serene beauty by the severe framework in which they are set. The cabinet of ebony, ivory, and silver stands at her right hand, between her chair and the fireplace. Its doors are open, one drawer is pulled out, and any one who cared to inspect its contents would find among them the miniature of a handsome lady with gray eyes, black hair, and a fine complexion, whose name was Kate; the letter written by Lawrence Daly, at Walter's dictation, which Miriam had discovered among Mr. St. Quentin's papers; and a number of enigmatical memoranda, in which figures fill a considerable space, and which appear to refer to certain payments made at irregular intervals for some unspecified purpose.

But the memoranda which Miriam show-

ed to Walter at the *Grand Hotel* at Dover are not there; she has destroyed them; and all the events to which they referred, together with the rage and terror, the suspense, excitement, and the triumph of that time, are as utterly gone and lost sight of as they are.

Just as Miriam has concluded her pleasant task, Miss Monitor comes in, brisk and bright, tight and talkative as ever, and full of the instructions which she has despatched to her cook at the cottage at Blackheath.

"Only that Ruth has had her feelings blunted by cooking for a girls' school for eight years, and is not easily put out, she might be alarmed at the idea of such a grand visitor as you, my dear!" said the happy little lady.

"I hope she has not left off making small currant dumplings sprinkled with powdered sugar," replied Miriam. "If you only knew

how often I have wished for one since!"

"Dear me! The idea of any one ever wanting to eat anything again one has eaten at a school-room dinner!" said Miss Monitor simply. "You shall have them, my dear, and then you will find out how nasty they are. Mercy on us, Miriam! Is all that money for the Sisters?"

"All that money is for the Sisiters' poor people," said Miriam; "and it is sadly little among so many."

"Well, my dear," said Miss Monitor admiringly, "I must say it is delightful to see money in such good hands as yours. And it is more than I expected of you, much as I liked you, for you were not very thoughtful or considerate, in the abstract, I mean—not unless you knew people, and liked them individually—in the old times. I think Mr. St. Quentin's influence and example must have done you a great deal of good,

strengthened and developed your character Don't you think so, Miriam?"

"I suppose it did," answered Miriam indifferently. She was not to be tempted into talking of Mr. St. Quentin, and presently the conversation turned upon their journey; upon the pleasurable business of selecting a house for Miriam in London; and upon all that Miriam was to do and to enjoy when she should have the house. She was in high spirits that day; she was really happy. She did not talk to herself about it, but she thoroughly appreciated the difference which it had made in her life to be free from the presence of a person whom she had come to dislike. She felt this so strongly that she, who had never known love, sometimes asked herself—when the subject would persist in pressing upon her attention, would not be put away—whether the presence of the beloved could be such an ever-delightful,

conscious, precious source of happiness as the absence of anyone to dislike; the freedom of daily, hourly, jarring chords in one's existence. Everything seemed to be going perfectly smooth and easy with Miriam now, and she looked like it, handsome, grand, happy, generous, authoritative. Of future possibilities for her heart, she had neither hope nor fear; of future possibilities for her intellect, she had great store of hopes and plans.

Mr. St. Quentin's notion of pleasant society had not comprised intellect. Fashion, if not of the very first rank, of a very good second rank, he had aspired to with some success, and he did not mind its being combined with dulness, as for the most part it was. Miriam did. She had delightful visions of the society of "clever" people, of a charming house which should be frequented by charming creatures who wrote books,

painted pictures, composed music, and understood the art of conversation. She had heard the word "Bohemian" somewhere, and she believed she knew what it meant. There should be no Bohemianism in her "literary and artistic circle;" all the artists, authors, composers, and talkers should be quite respectable, but highly gifted. She revealed these great designs to Miss Monitor, who received them coldly. Miriam was hardly ever silly, and a little silliness once in a way was easily pardoned by her good friend.

"You can try it, my dear," she said dubiously. "You may remember I told you my father was an author—in the solid, biographical line—and he is as much forgotten as if he had been one of the modern three-novels-in-three-volumes-each-a-year-people. He used to say there was such mistake as literary society; no duller people anywhere

than authors and artists, chiefly, I suppose, because they are generally very tired with hard work, and want people to amuse *them*. I can't say I cared for any of them whom I used to see when I was a girl, especially if I had liked their books or their pictures very much before I made their acquaintance. They certainly never amused *me*. However, as I said before, you can try."

Miriam thought this was all rubbish, and resolved that she would try.

The last few days in Paris were very pleasant to their friends. Miriam was rather sorry to leave her pretty rooms when the time came, even for the prospect of novelty in her London home. She loved them, she prized everything in them. She was very generous, but she had acquisitiveness largely developed in her character. If she had been a man, she would have delighted in adding field to field, in flocks and

herds, and in money-bags, though she would have dispensed their contents with a liberal hand. Being a woman, she loved her furniture, her rich carpets and hangings, the beautiful things which filled her rooms, her plate, and her porcelain, her equipages, and her jewels. She would have shared them lavishly, but she loved them every one, she who had never known what it was to love, beyond the calm circle of kindred, and had no notion of a power which could smite the idols from their place in her heart, and dash them into dust.

A few hours after Miriam and Miss Monitor had left Paris, a well-appointed but plain *coupé* drew up at the great gate of the hotel, and a gentleman stepped out and accosted the *concierge*. This gentleman was a dapper personage, of middle height and spare figure, with a clean shaven face and shrewd observant eyes. He was dressed

with an accurate plainness and elaborate neatness which gave him somewhat the air of an Anglican clergyman of High Church principles. Since Mr. St. Quentin's death, this gentleman had not been seen at the hotel, and the present *concierge*, being new to the place, did not know him. After a few minutes' parley, the dapper gentleman committed a card and a letter to the care of the *concierge*, got into the *coupé* again, and was driven away.

At the same moment, one of Mrs. St. Quentin's servants, whom she had left in Paris, came in at the *porte-cochère*.

"Hold!" said the *concierge*. "Here has been a little Monsieur inquiring for Madame; and much chagrined at her departure. He has confided to me this letter and card, to be sent to the address of Madame."

The servant leaned on the ledge of the little window through which the *concierge*

addressed him, and inspected these articles.

"Hold!" said he—"Monsieur Caux! Why comes he hither again? It used to be for Monsieur only."

"Who is he—this Monsieur Caux?"

The man laughed.

"What know I? Ask that in the Rue Jerusalem."

"Ho, ho!—is he there? That understands itself—these old gentlemen, as they tell me Monsieur was, have lived, in ordinary, and find agents who may be trusted, convenient. But why——"

"I have changed my mind," said a clear, quiet, polite voice behind the servant's shoulder, causing him to start away from the aperture, and the *concierge* to look up surprised, "and will forward my letter to Madame St. Quentin myself, if you can give me her address in England."

"Certainly," said the *concierge*, on whom

the mention of the Rue Jerusalem in connection with the name of M. Caux, had produced a salutary effect. "Perhaps Monsieur will copy the address himself;" and he laid a book open before M. Caux, from which that gentleman transcribed on one of his cards Miriam's address at Blackheath; while he was doing this, the servant went on into the hotel.

"That is much better," said M. Caux, as he carefully replaced the letter in a case, full of neatly-folded papers, suspended in the carriage within easy reach of his hand—"much better. She might take no notice of a written application, but she can hardly refuse me a personal interview, demanded on the strength of this. There may be something to come of it, and there may be nothing—time will shew. The old gentleman paid me in full; I have no claim; still this *may* be worth another fee to me, and it

will certainly keep until she returns from London."

"Madame had left Paris that morning," had been the answer of the *concierge* to M. Caux's question. Only a few hours, only an unpurchasable, immeasurable, irreparable space between her and the knowledge she might have gained of the truth! The letter which M. Caux had decided to retain till her return was addressed to himself, and consisted of only a few lines, dated from New York, three months before, but which, by some accident, never explained, had not been posted until the last mail. The lines were as follows:—

"*L—— D——intends to go to England in the Spring, and will then communicate with Mr. St. Quentin.*"

CHAPTER X.

A TERROR OF GREAT DARKNESS.

ON a bright soft April day Miriam arrived at the Firs. She had chosen her house in London, and set decorators and upholsterers to work upon it. She had brightened up Miss Monitor's life by her visit to the cottage, her admiration of the cow, and her promise to repeat these kindnesses; and now she had come, with reluctance, but with good courage also, to the ordeal of meeting Walter. It seemed to her that this was the only thing she should have to dread henceforth in life, and that the meeting, the first look into each other's

eyes, the first few minutes passed together, without the presence of any other person, over, this phantom—for she held it a mere phantom—would be laid, like the rest, and her way would be quite plain. So, when the time which had been arranged for her visit came, she went to the trial calmly.

Florence was in great delight. The prospect of having Miriam in her old home with Walter, in unrestricted freedom, all the former misery and dissension utterly gone for ever; and that most wonderful of all babies to be shown to his aunt, was as much happiness as Florence could desire in this world, now that her Walter was at home "for good." She did not actually say to herself that it was very pleasant to make up their family party without Mr. St. Quentin; she would have been shocked to find herself thinking anything so dreadful, but she certainly was a little curious to see how

Miriam looked in her weeds, and fully expected to find her in capital spirits. Florence was a pretty picture in those days. In the fulness of her happiness, the realization of her thorougly feminine ideal, her beauty had matured, and the added self-possession of her manner took nothing from its gentleness and its grace. She was as busy as a bee, but she was not fussy, and she was not narrow. Her whole heart was centred in her home and its beloved inmates; but her intellect overstepped that boundary, and Florence Clint was as perfect an example as could be found of a true woman who, incapable of the moral discord implied in deserting her own sphere, assiduously aspires to the best standard of duty and culture within it.

The sisters-in-law were both beautiful, each in her own style and way; but there was more than the difference between them

of stature, complexion, and temperament. There was the difference between the childless wife and the mother; between the woman who has never loved, and the woman who from girlhood has borne the sacred burden of solicitude and care for another, the weight of a double life. When Florence thought most lovingly of Miriam, she pitied her most for this. And Miriam did not pity herself in the least. She had never wished for children, and she had been content to do so without love in the past, and contemplated a picture in which it was to have no place, with complacence. The spectacle of Florence's domestic happiness would have for Miriam no drop of bitterness, no suggestion of envy.

Miriam had expected to find Walter at the station at Drington, and had prepared herself to get over the only nervousness she anticipated having to feel during the drive

to the Firs. But Florence was on the platform when the train came up, without Walter; and then Miriam thought her brother was shrinking from the meeting even more than she was. Florence was not surprised. As they were rattling along in her pretty pony-carriage, she told Miriam he was delighted she was coming, but he was dreadfully lazy—sometimes it was really too bad—and he hated driving the ponies. Miriam asked if he rode. But it appeared he did not; he hated riding, said it shook him, and made his head ache. He liked staying in the house best, it seemed, and was so fond of playing with baby that he was to be forgiven for apparent laziness on that account. Miriam thought it was very real laziness, and decided in her own mind that Walter must have altered very much since his "digger" days. The two women looked furtively at one another during the drive;

and Miriam then told Florence frankly she had not believed she could have grown so very pretty, so much more than pretty; but Florence did not tell Miriam she had been curious to see her in her weeds.

Walter met them at the door, and he greeted Miriam with frank, unembarrassed affection. Her heart beat heavily, and she felt that her face turned exceedingly pale as she returned his kindly kiss, and looked into his eyes for that pang of recollection which she was prepared to find there. But she did not see it. There was not the slightest shrinking of his eyes from hers, not the most fleeting change of colour or hesitating inflection of the voice. He bade her welcome as if they had met last under the most ordinary circumstances, and was so spontaneously cheerful and unconcerned that Miriam found it difficult to impute his demeanour to self-control. She felt there was

much greater power in that way in herself than in Walter, and yet she could not on this occasion reach such as his composure. They all entered the house together; and Florence went for the wonderful baby, leaving Walter and Miriam together in the study.

"Now," she thought, "there will be a reference. Now he will say or look something, and then it will be over for the future."

But he neither looked nor said anything. He talked of her house in town, and pointed out some improvements in Florence's flower-garden. And then Florence came in with the baby, and after a family offering of incense to that small divinity, they adjourned to dress for dinner. Miriam was relieved, and yet puzzled; she could not understand her brother, she felt somehow as if this man were not Walter. Their brief, eventful interview at Dover had been so momentous she had had no time to think of him, to take

note of the change in his appearance; except his gray hair, she had not observed any. But she did now; she noticed his indolent manner, his sleepy expression, and his look of age. She must question Florence about his health.

At dinner, Walter was very lively and agreeable; but Miriam, observing him closely, saw that there was a curious indecision about him. There was not much carving done at table, but Florence did it all. Walter paid no attention to anything but his own dinner; and even about that was slow and awkward, letting his fork drop, and upsetting his wine-glass. As the ladies were leaving the dining-room, Florence leaned over his shoulder, and said:

"Don't be long over your wine. Miriam wants to hear all about the gold-diggings to-night; so don't go to sleep here."

"Does he go to sleep after dinner?" asked Miriam.

"Indeed, he does," replied Florence. "Isn't it a horrid habit? Almost every evening I have to go and shake him up; and sometimes he falls asleep after luncheon. Indeed, I often tell him he has quite an unfair allowance of sleep in his life."

"Do you think that is safe, Florence?—good for him, I mean? What does he really do, dear? What are the occupations of his life?"

"The occupations of his life? Well—I can hardly tell you. He is not agricultural, you know, so we've let the home-farm; and he's not fond of gardening—it makes his head ache. A great many things make his head ache since he had that terrible fever."

"Does he manage the place well?—look after things, and all that?"

"Well, indeed, I cannot say he does," said Florence, laughing; "he says I do all that sort of thing better than he does, and

that it tires him. He does not even care about the stables. I'm afraid, Miriam, I must confess he's lazy; but you must not blame him. He had to work so hard for such a long time! And he is so sweet-tempered, and so fond of baby and me, and no trouble in the house. You won't mind him being what he calls 'all about' a good deal, will you, Miriam? He is not a bit like other men, interfering with women's occupations and bothering them."

"I shan't mind it in the least, dear," replied Miriam, who was thinking—"He may not be a bit like other men, but he is also not in the least like my brother Walter." And she went on—"Is he fond of reading?"

"He does not care for reading to himself, but he likes me to read to him, and I do, when I have time. But I have been threatening him to leave off lately, he falls asleep so often."

"That was a very bad fever, was it not, he had just at the time our father died?"

"Oh, yes, dreadful! You may imagine how frightened I was when he was ill in the Winter, after he left you at Dover; and Mr. Martin said it was a strange kind of fever, with which he was not familiar. I did not tell you at the time, because you had so much to distress you," said Florence, in her simple way; "and it would have been time enough for you to know, if it had been absolutely necessary to alarm you about him; and it did not last long. Mr. Martin said, when Walter recovered, that he had treated the fever almost at random; but he had certainly treated it successfully. He was very weak and quiet for a long time, and seemed rather indifferent about everything except me, and baby, when baby came; but it left no bad effects, thank God!"

"I am not by any means so sure of that," thought Miriam. "Was he delirious in the fever?"

"Oh, yes: his mind wandered awfully. But Mr. Martin said that was better. There must have been stupor if it hadn't. He frightened me first, and made me think it was not a feverish cold, but fever, by talking about an old man in an Indian gown and a red night-cap making a will, and looking in the *Times* for somebody to leave his money to.—Why, Miriam, you are as pale as death. Perhaps you don't like to hear about anything of that kind."

"I do, indeed—I do. I only turned pale at the idea of Walter's having been in such danger."

"As I have done many a time, when I have thought that he might have died of the first fever out in that horrid place; and Mr. Daly too; and we might never have heard

anything about either of them. And he must have died, if it had not been for Mr. Daly. I wish you could hear Walter tell the story himself; but he must not. I never mention it to him."

"Why?"

"Because it distressed him so much. Mr. Daly, you know, had the fever before Walter took it, and he never quite got over the effect of it. He is, or was, when Walter and he parted, a little eccentric—it was a delusion—which grew up in the fever, and never left him. I will tell you about it some other time; I must go and wake Walter now. If I didn't, he would sleep there for hours."

With a sweet, happy smile on her untroubled face, Florence left Miriam, who was much, though vaguely disturbed by what she had just heard. Subsequent observation of Walter did not tend to re-assure her.

Before her first day at the Firs had reached its conclusion, Miriam's mind was so fully engaged in puzzling speculations concerning her brother, that she had ceased to think about the mutual associations between herself and him, for the indications of which she had so painfully looked.

Walter came back with Florence. He had been asleep, he acknowledged, and perhaps that accounted for his looking dull and stupid, and for an uncertainty in his gait which his sister observed at once. During the whole evening he sat still. He talked to them, and was very happy; but where was the restlessness so characteristic of men in health, when they are under no restraint? If Walter had walked up and down, in his old way, while he told them his Californian stories, Miriam would have liked it much better. Florence sat on a footstool beside his chair, resting her head against his knee,

looking up at Miriam ; and when he paused, as he often did, for a name or a word, she smilingly supplied it. And this not only when the topic was his Californian adventures, but when, later, they strayed into ordinary subjects of conversation, and Walter would pause, not from the suspension of the mechanism of speech called stuttering, but from an evident lapse of memory. Then Florence would speak the lost word, and he would go on. Again, for a few moments, before they separated for the night, Walter and Miriam were alone together. This time she determined, anything being better than the vague, mysterious alarm which was creeping over her, to lead him directly to the subject in her thoughts.

" Walter," she said, " will you let me tell you how much I felt about meeting you, after all that had passed, and——"

" Of course, I know ; but don't talk of it,

Miriam. I would have come to you, in your trouble, if I could, but I was very ill, you know. Caught cold, and had a fever. It really was not my fault."

"*Would* have come to me, Walter? Why, you *did* come to me!"

"Yes, yes; I started, after you telegraphed, of course; but there was nothing in *that*, you know; I could not go on, and indeed I hardly know how I got home. But don't let us talk of it, Miriam; I hate unpleasant subjects."

Miriam obeyed him. Indeed, she could not speak. To utter astonishment was added a thrill of indescribable dread. For a moment she actually felt afraid of Walter himself, sitting there, in his chair, before her, perfectly calm, and making her this unaccountable reply. He was talking of the second time she had sent for him; she, of the first, and yet, the second summons had

been by letter, not by telegraph. Miriam said no more; but, when Florence was with her up-stairs, in her own old room, she questioned her as closely as she dared about Walter's illness. Florence answered her freely, and, being skillfully led up to the point by Miriam, told her it was such an odd thing that Walter had forgotten all about his having gone to Dover, and was at the utmost distress at his inability to comply with Doctor Ashley's summons.

"Mr. Martin said it was part of the delirium of the fever," added Florence, "and told me not to talk to him about it at any time; and so, of course, I have not done so. Let me brush your hair, Miriam, for the sake of old times!"

Then the two young women drifted into a sentimental, reminiscent conversation, which, however, did not so far divert Miriam from the matter in her thoughts but that she

resolved to discuss it with Mr. Martin at the first opportunity.

The opportunity offered itself the next day but one. Mr. Martin and Mrs. Cooke, and many others among the neighbourhood, who had once stood aloof from the Firs, but had been won, to a man and a woman, by Florence, were all anxious to see how the young, handsome, and rich Mrs. St. Quentin looked in her weeds. The result of this laudable curiosity was an impromptu luncheon party at the Firs, and afterwards a general stroll in the gardens and plantations—where the young green tassels were beginning to hang themselves out. Miriam detached Mr. Martin from the party, and entered upon the matter in her thoughts with characteristic promptitude and directness, by asking him to give her a detailed account of Walter's illness at the time of Mr. St. Quentin's death.

Mr. Martin complied; and Miriam learned from his narrative that her brother had been ailing from the moment of his return to the Firs, and that delirium had set in very rapidly. He described the wandering of the mind, and repeated much to which she had the key. Mr. Martin acknowledged that he had believed Walter's mental condition to be unsound for some time after Florence thought him perfectly well again, but he had no suspicion that anything of the kind now existed. He had not seen much of him since his recovery, having been away from Drington for nearly three months; in his professional capacity he had, since his return, visited only the sovereign and all-absorbing baby, and he had not taken particular notice of Walter. Miriam, who could not explain the chief source, the real inspiring cause of her disquiet, laid great stress upon his somnolence and indolence; but she did

not impress Mr. Martin very seriously.

"The truth is, my dear," he said, "I am accustomed to regard Walter as such an uncommonly lucky dog, that I am not surprised to find him turning out an uncommonly idle one also. With such a wife to adore him—a woman as clever as she is good; nothing that *must* be done to do; plenty of money; the remembrance of very hard work, which makes a holiday life apt to prolong itself, and a fine natural capacity for indolence—you must permit me to remind you, my dear, that Walter never *liked* work of any kind—I really think we need not put his laziness down to any more recondite cause than content."

"Do you think it is content that makes him look so old, ten years older than his age, and at least five years older than climate can account for? Is it content that makes him drop all sorts of things out of his

hands, and look vacantly at them when they fall? Is it content that makes him lie down on the sofas all about the house, whenever there's no one to watch him, and rouse him up, and that renders him almost insensible to pain?"

"What!" said Dr. Martin; "Walter insensible to pain? He used to be quite the reverse."

"He gave himself one of the worst cuts I ever saw, this morning, with a broken pane of glass in the conservatory, and I don't think he knew he had cut himself. I was close by, and I knew nothing, until I saw blood on baby's frock, and found it came from Walter's hand."

"That's bad," said Dr. Martin. "Anything more?"

"Many things more. He hardly ever speaks without stammering, and he constantly stands with his eyes shut. Florence notices

none of these things; she is always with him, and is the most serene-minded and adaptive of women. Besides—Mr. Martin, pray attend to this—he eats a great deal more than he ought to eat."

"My dear Miriam, this is one of your French notions."

"Indeed, it is not. I think French people habitually eat more than English people—it is my observation. I don't like the quantity he eats, or the way in which he eats it. You dine with us to-day; will you promise me to watch him, and judge for yourself?"

"I will."

They rejoined the party; and Miriam saw that Mr. Martin kept an unseen watch upon Walter during the whole of that day. In the course of the week, he came several times to the Firs, and though he said nothing to her on the subject, she was satisfied

that he was steadily taking observations, and that those observations were leading him in the direction of the apprehensions which she, for a reason far outweighing any within his ken, entertained more and more keenly day by day. The unconsciousness of Florence, while it was most fortunate, touched Miriam deeply. When anything odd, unusual, uncouth, in Walter's demeanour made itself apparent, Florence was only anxious to conceal it, if possible; and if that was not possible, to account and apologise for it in some simple way. To keep him from the possibility of being blamed by *others*, was her object; it never occurred to her to read the meaning of these things *to himself*.

When Miriam had been a fortnight at the Firs, during which time Mr. Martin had rarely allowed a day to elapse without a visit, he said to her—

"When is your house in town to be ready for occupation?"

"At the end of next week, I expect."

"I advise you to go there, to hasten the preparations by your presence, and to dispense with all superfluous arrangements. My dear Miriam, you are right about poor Walter. I have watched him too closely to be mistaken. You must get him and Florence up to London, immediately, on the best pretext you can devise. When you have them there, she must be told the truth, and the best advice in the profession must be procured without delay. There has been too much already—though, God knows, I don't!—whether it is ever of much use in such cases."

"God help him and her!" said Miriam.

And so the first blow was dealt by Fate to that fair structure of hope and purpose which Miriam had built; a blow which

caused it to rock and tremble to its foundations. This involved all whom she loved in the world. They were not many—two human beings only—but Miriam loved her brother and his wife with all the intensity and depth of such concentration; and the agony, not only of her own suffering, but of the intolerable, terrible compassion she felt for them both, almost overpowered her for awhile. But the demand for action was too imminent, the necessity for concealment was too absolute, to admit of any yielding on Miriam's part which the utmost strength of her will could subdue. She bore it, not blindly, not listlessly, but with a keen-sighted intelligence which looked it through and through, which saw it all, and foresaw it all, every phase of the humiliating withdrawal of the animating spirit from the form of the one, every successive wrench in the

process of the breaking of the strong, loving, simple heart of the other.

Of a truth, her palace of pride and pleasure rocked and reeled.

Three days later, Miriam was in London, at her house in Lowndes Square, where a few rooms had been prepared for her occupation. A pretext was found for getting Florence up to town, in Miriam's wish to avail herself of her taste in the finishing of the house. Unconscious Florence was quite pleased. She wished Walter had shown more interest about it, but he merely assented. He would brighten up when he found himself in town. A day was fixed for their arrival with the baby and their servants. Mr. Martin was to come to London also, but without their knowledge, and not to Miriam's house. He would arrange for a consultation with certain famous physicians, and then Florence must be told—

something—must be to some extent prepared.

"If she does not read it in my face the moment she crosses the door," said Miriam half aloud, as she stood leaning her head on her raised hands, turned with their open palms against the wall, in a room of her London house, as she stood, one night in Paris, by the wires in her aviary, in the perplexity of a far less trouble. "I could bear it for him, but I cannot bear it for her. Oh, Florence, Florence!"

A bell rang loudly, and Miriam started from her forlorn attitude, and looked into the street, with a momentary terror lest they had already arrived. Absurd! They could not be here for hours yet. How she dreaded seeing Walter now! What had that former dread, which she had almost forgotten, been to this? If he should be more vacant, more indolent, more forgetful,

more gluttonous! If—— What else *must* he be? There could be nothing else but sinking lower and lower until the blank was reached. How awful! how awful! Would to God that he, her brother whom she loved, might die first! She turned her white, miserable face at the sound of a step. A servant approached her, with a card on a salver.

"Are you at home to that gentleman, ma'am?"

She took the card, and read: "Mr. Lawrence Daly."

CHAPTER XI.

L—— D——.

THEY had been an hour together, these two, who had never met before, but to each of whom the idea of the other had been familiar for years. It was surely a kind Providence that had sent Lawrence Daly to Miriam at such a moment, and his coming was a good omen. He was the one person in the world who knew and loved Walter as she did, perhaps better, with the deeper knowledge, and the fuller love of close companionship and a common life. He had known Florence in her early time of trouble, and he would pity and aid her

in this, a far drearier and darker day. A friend to herself in her great loneliness, a counsellor in her great perplexity—all these thoughts had come in an instant to Miriam as she read Lawrence Daly's name, and were strengthened with her first glance at him.

And Lawrence! What were his thoughts as he stood in the presence of that "Miriam" who had been a "phantom of delight" to his fancy, for many a day before she "dawned upon his sight?" How had he pictured her to his imagination, in those days when he and Walter used to talk about her in the lone hut, and in the later time when he learned that his friend's beautiful sister was a widow? He could not have put his own fancy into words, but it certainly had not resembled this reality—a pale woman, with a face in which grief and dread, and a kind of relief and pleasure too, were contending; a woman

as oblivious of herself, of any effect she might produce, as if she had been old and ugly, who, while she looked at him and spoke to him, and welcomed him with an outstretched hand and kind words, was so evidently seeing something else with her mind's eye that she instantly communicated a sensation of fear to him. Was she even beautiful, this Miriam—of whose face he had drawn many an aërial picture—as she stood there, in her long crape dress, clasped with jet, and her widow's cap, which had fallen off, and was clinging by its crimped edge to her rich bright hair, until she pulled it on, and tied the strings under her chin, in perfect unconsciousness? Perhaps not; he could not tell; but so much was certain, that ever until the end, whenever he chose to do so, Lawrence Daly could bring her before his mind's eye as he saw her in the first minutes of that first interview.

They had been an hour together, and Miriam had told Lawrence how it was with Walter, and he had received the intelligence with such emotion as had in some strange way comforted her with the soothing sense of a shared sorrow. And he had told her the story—of which poor Florence had been able only to give her a garbled version and a bare outline—the story of the nugget and the murder, and of Walter's mysterious oblivion. She listened, with a new sense of awe creeping over her. Once more Walter's nerves had been subjected to a great trial, and again that wondrous, inexplicable gift of memory had failed him, had been withdrawn from him. As Lawrence described first the doubt, and then the fear, and finally the terrible certainty with which he had noted this mental change in Walter, an eager longing awoke in her to add her testimony also, to tell him that she could understand

—she had suffered from them all. The bond of absolute secrecy between her and the mind over which a veil was being slowly but surely drawn, began to be intolerable to her. The story itself interested her vividly, and the calm, manly way in which Lawrence spoke, quite unaffectedly, of the loss of the gold, and the necessity for further exile in which it involved him, impressed her deeply. He knew she was expecting Walter's arrival in town—he had heard that from Miss Monitor, whose address he had procured in Paris, and at whose cottage he had called on the previous day—and he had come to Mrs. St. Quentin's house hoping to find his friend there; but learning that she was as yet alone, he had not been able to resist the temptation to introduce himself. If he had not found her in such trouble—trouble which no one could so truly estimate and share as he, he should

have had to ask her forgiveness. She assured him, frankly, that she had never thought of him as a stranger, and that his name was a household word at the Firs.

"Literally, a household word," she repeated, "for the baby's name is—Lawrence." The slightest tinge of colour came to her cheeks as she pronounced the name, which sounded to him like delicious music.

"Poor child," said Lawrence; "poor young wife!"

"And she loves him so—oh, how she loves him! I cannot imagine how she will ever bear it."

"*I can*," he said, solemnly. "I have seen Mrs. Clint endure sharp trial for his sake, with a self-sacrificing simple courage which I have never forgotten. She will bear this—far, far worse than anything which has gone before—also for his sake, with the same."

Miriam told him everything. They talked of the past, the present, and the future of Walter and his wife, and Lawrence gave her some hope. It might be a long time before Walter should grow worse, and in his present state there was nothing which would expose him to general remark, nothing which would make Florence very unhappy when she should be reconciled to the first painful truth that her Walter was unlike other people, and changed from his former self. Miriam listened to him with growing confidence. This friend of her brother's was a strong man, with a kind heart, brave and gentle; she knew so much of him long ago, when Florence used to talk to her about Daly. He was unlike all the other men she was acquainted with; simpler, more kindly, more serious. It was true that she saw him, for the first time, under very peculiar circumstances; but, never-

theless, she felt that no other man she had ever known would have, in the given case, been just the same as he was.

Was he at all like the picture her fancy had painted of him? Florence's description of him had been very vague, as a woman's description of any man, except the one she loves, is apt to be, and Miriam had retained no more of it than the facts that he was tall, and had a long, fine brown beard. As she grew calmer, and their conversation took a more settled tone, Miriam began to study his appearance, and to recognise how handsome he was; of how noble and grand a presence. Where had she seen a face, not exactly like Lawrence's face, but of which his reminded her? A face with fine, clear-cut features, a broad forehead, and "level fronting;" dark-gray eyes, sweet and piercing, under dark brows, and shaded with thick dark lashes. Very strange and beau-

tiful eyes, with a man's courage looking out of them, and a woman's pity. No wonder Florence had trusted this man, and Walter had loved him.

"Did he speak of me often?" Lawrence asked, as Miriam was describing her visit to the Firs.

"Very often; but I had been warned by Florence to say nothing of—of the story you have told me, because it distressed him, and so, much of the most interesting part of your life in California was not discussed."

"I understand. Poor Walter thought I had got a craze, and now I shall never be able to undeceive him."

"I suppose not," said Miriam; and again, as many times before during their interview, unheeded tears ran down her cheeks. "There will be no possibility of correcting an impression made on his poor mind now."

"Not only for that reason, which, I trust,

is not so decisive as you fear," said Lawrence, "but because the clue I hoped to obtain is lost."

And then he told her the sequel to the story of the nugget; his meeting with Deering at New York, and the final loss of the pocket-book.

"I had to relinquish the hope of finding the gold then," he continued, "and to apply my mind to turning our dust to some purpose. I had Walter's share as well as my own, you know. And I have not done badly, on the whole—I shall give the poor fellow an account of my stewardship before I return."

"Are you going back to America?"

"Yes; I have got into a groove there, and I shall keep in it, until something worth having has come of my 'pegging away.' There is no particular object for me in England now—unless, indeed, I could do some-

thing for Walter, but I fear that is taken out of my hands—and I shall return before long. Some day or other, I mean to revisit the old place, when this wonderful railway which is to join the Atlantic and Pacific shores shall be finished; and perhaps, if I am not too rich to care about it—than which nothing can be more unlikely—to try once more to hit upon the spot where Walter buried that Will-o'-the-Wisp, our nugget. I have made a drawing from memory of our hut and its vicinity, the cliff, the ravine, and the claim generally. I will bring it to you. It will interest you to get an idea of the place where Walter lived so long."

"It is very hard," said Miriam, "that Walter, who owes his life to your care, should have been the means of obliging you to forsake your own country."

Lawrence looked very sad.

"I don't think Walter has much to thank me for, Mrs. St. Quentin, if it be with him as we are forced to think it is. It would have been better for him, perhaps, if he had died of the fever in the lone hut."

"Oh, no!" said Miriam, and her eyes sparkled for the first time, within his sight of them, with their beautiful brightness—"Oh, no; better far as it is for *her*—for Florence. He came back to her; she has had much happiness—a good store for remembrance, if it is to have no added day; and if he can only live, live *anyhow*, if he only *is*, and is *hers*, she will be happy still, I am sure she will. Anything—anything for *her* rather than life without him!"

Since when had Miriam learned the worth and the meaning of love? How had her calm appreciation, the deliberate judgment of an outsider, become obscured? What had taught her, all of a sudden, to read the

heart of a woman like Florence, hitherto a mystery to her, vaguely beautiful indeed, but which, nevertheless, she was content to leave unsolved?

Lawrence looked at her, and wondered —wondered at the sudden transition of look, of attitude, of colour, which in a moment revealed the beauty, the brilliancy, the life with which his fancy had invested her; wondered at the intuition which made this woman, who had never loved—so Walter had told him, but, after all, how did Walter know?—who had certainly made a marriage the very opposite of Florence's,—free of the whole motive and mystery of Florence's life.

"You are right," he said, "and I was wrong. Perhaps, for the moment, I was thinking of Walter himself only. But—to return to what you said—I am not so much of an injured individual after all. I have no

ties, and have been more or less of a waif always. The strongest bond between me and my country, or rather between me and England—for I am an Irishman, you know —is Walter."

Those sweet and piercing dark-grey eyes, with their dark brows and lashes, were, then, the "Irish eyes" she had heard people talk of. Where had she seen them in a picture? Was it in an artist's studio in Paris? So ran her truant fancy while he was speaking.

"He told me you had no relatives."

"I have none. The last individual with whom, so far as I know, I might have claimed kindred, died six months ago, though I did not know the fact for nearly three months afterwards. I was in the Southern States at the time, and did not hear of it until I got back to New York. May I tell you a story about myself, Mrs. St. Quentin—or

shall I go away now, and come again another day?"

"No, no," she said hurriedly. "Pray, stay with me; pray, go on! You will remain and see Walter, will you not?"

"If you wish it. If it will not harm him."

"I don't think it can; he is only too impassive. Then that is settled; you will stay."

Her manner was abrupt and nervous. He imputed it, and so did she, to the agitation of the expected arrival. At all events, whether it would be wise for him to see Walter or not, it was certainly as well that Miriam should not be left alone.

They were sitting, one at either side of the fireplace; and Miriam now pushed her chair back—the flame was catching her face. A large green carriage-fan lay on the mantelpiece, and Lawrence rose and handed it to her unasked. She thanked him, and sat, holding it in her left hand between

her face and the fire, looking up at him.

He began, with a smile, half sad, half comical: "I told Mrs. Clint all about myself once. I wonder whether she repeated any of my not very moving history to you?"

"She did," said Miriam. "Florence told me about your mother's death, and your expectations from a relative in India, who disappointed them. I think she said you had had no communication with him for a long time, and had given up all hope of his keeping his promises, before you went abroad with Walter."

"That is a perfectly correct outline of the story. But, not very long ago, this interrupted communication was renewed, under rather singular circumstances. The relative in question was not only a relative, but also a connection by marriage. He married my mother's sister, my best friend, and the only human being whom I loved, or who loved

me. He deceived and cheated her for a long time with delusive promises of what he would do for me; but she died, nearly seven years ago, and then it was all over. There was nothing more to be looked for in that quarter, except, in the very unlikely event of the old gentleman's dying without a will, my succession to his property as heir-at-law. Upon this possibility, however, I never suffered my mind to dwell for a moment. Though his wife was dead, and he had no child, there was no likelihood, even supposing he did not marry again—as I felt certain he would, and as he actually did—that he should not have many to prefer before me, whom he had never seen, and against whom I believe him to have been deeply prejudiced. In fact, I am quite certain he hated me, very nearly all through his life, and would have gone on hating me until the end of it, but for the interference

of some influence or other, which I have vainly tried to trace. Once I did think I had traced it; but a question which I casually asked of a lady—the only lady, except yourself, I have seen since I came to London—was answered in a manner to disperse that notion, to my regret."

Miriam did not quite understand him. There was something more in his voice and manner than the story he was narrating, as she followed it with a secret nervousness for which she could not account. There was something which seemed in an inexplicable way personal to herself in what he was saying.

He continued:—"Pray, bear in mind, for otherwise you will fail to understand my story, and myself, that I never entertained the remotest expectation of succeeding to my relative's property, and that when, a few months ago, the circumstances occurred

which I am about to relate, the notion was, if possible, more utterly removed than ever by the discovery that he had married in the interval, as I expected him to do. A few weeks after I met Deering at New York, I began to tire of his society. He was a man I never liked, belonging to the tribe of 'smart men,' whom I detest, and troubled with no delicacy of mind whatever. I am too old a traveller to be thin-skinned, and I don't mind inquisitiveness as a general rule; but my patience gave way under the perpetual cross-questioning of Deering—one of the most secret, stealthy, mysterious fellows in the world about his own affairs, of which I did not want, of course, to know anything —and I said to him I believed he must have some motive for being so excessively curious about me, my ancestors, and my antecedents. I didn't half mean it, and I was sorry, in half a second, for having said it. But it

seemed I had hit a blot. The whole mystery of Deering's interest in me was revealed—not that he would not even then, I believe, have gone on concealing it, only that the moment had arrived at which I must needs appear upon the scene. The interest was of a pecuniary nature. It turned out that Deering's attention had been attracted by an advertisement in the *Times*, repeated in some New York papers, in which information was required concerning a certain individual, whom he at once identified with me, and that he had been for some time in correspondence with the agent in Paris to whom this information was to be supplied. He did not defend himself in the matter, he did not think he required defence; nor do I think so. He argued, very justly, that whatever I was to hear to my advantage would not be increased if the information came direct from me—which in-

deed it couldn't have done, for I never saw one of the advertisements, and should, but for Deering, have been in perfect ignorance until this day—and that it could not be decreased by his having turned an honest penny by supplying the information. How many honest pennies he actually did turn, I do not know, but a good many, I don't doubt; and he and I parted no worse friends because he had made some money out of me in that way, and one or two other ways —and because I positively declined acting on his advice. I always suspect he had pledged himself to produce me bodily, and had been paid in advance, but he succeeded in producing nothing but my handwriting."

"What was this man's advice to you?" asked Miriam, in a low voice, as she took the fan in her right hand, interposing it between her face and his.

"His advice was that I should go to

Paris at once, and present myself to the agent. But why should I have done so, Mrs. St. Quentin? The relative who was now advertising for me, from a motive which I could not understand, had deceived, trifled with, and disappointed me before, and I had gotten over it, lived it down, prospered moderately, and at least worked hard, without his aid. How should I know what were his intentions now? I had no further claim upon him; he had married again—a young wife, too, but this time a young wife who knew nothing about me, who was nothing to me, whom he could not torment and rule through me, as he had, I firmly believe, tormented and ruled his first wife. I was not going to yield one scrap of my independence, to abandon my least intention for him; he might mean something —in which case his meaning would keep;— he might mean nothing—in which case I

should not be put to inconvenience. I told Deering my mind plainly; and then I perceived that Deering must have made all he expected to make by the transaction, for he did not urge me. He pressed me on the point of going to England in the Spring—I was then just about to go down South, and he got me to write a few lines to the effect that I would do so—and we parted. When I returned, I found the whole thing settled for me. Deering had heard from the agent in Paris; my letter had never reached him—I suppose it had been mislaid by Deering, or somebody to whom he had trusted to mail it—however, it did not matter, for the information was no longer of value to any one. The wealth, which only a freak of fortune or a *dernier ressort* of the law could ever have made mine, had gone into much better hands, which, I pray, may long administer

it." He rose and approached her, drew the fan away with courteous gentleness, and held out his hand.

"Mrs. St. Quentin, I thought you knew—until Miss Monitor told me that you did not—that your husband's name was Clibborn; he changed it to St. Quentin because there was once a general of that name of kin to his mother, and it sounded better: I knew nothing about that until Deering found it out from Caux—and that his first wife was my aunt Kate.

Miriam sat before him, motionless, white, silent. She made no movement towards taking the hand which he held out, though she saw it, and oh! wretched woman, saw the smile, drawing her heart from her bosom into his, which went towards her with the hand.

He coloured, drew back, and said: "I beg your pardon. I have offended you. I

should have told you this in some other way."

She only said with a gasp for breath, and an increase of her frightful paleness: "You are L—— D——."

He did not understand her, and he was alarmed. What had he done? What cruel folly to try her nerves in any way, when they were already so tried by grief and anxiety.

"I entreat you to forgive me," he stammered. "I did not think—I fancied it would please you to know there was another tie between Walter's friend and yourself. I——"

"Hush!" she said, in a voice so hoarse and unmusical that its sound still more alarmed him. "It is no matter; it is no fault of yours. Don't mind me." She stood up, catching at the mantelpiece with her left hand. "Please to leave me for the present,

Mr. Daly," she said, "and not to speak to me. I have changed my mind. You must not meet Walter to-day. I will write to you. But go now, pray go."

He lingered for a moment, but her face told him it was best to obey her, and he went without a word.

CHAPTER XII.

SWIFT RETRIBUTION.

SO it had come! A horrible, swift retribution, which revealed while it punished her sin! Miriam sat like a stone statue, after Lawrence had left her, thinking, with intensity unmeasured by time, to which a minute's duration was like a year's agony, of that which had befallen her. The event she had relegated to the past, the thing that was gone and done with, the trial she had come through—they were here, in horrible, actual presence of her, under a terrific form which her imagination could not have conceived. How often must she have been near touch-

ing this truth, which, had she touched it, would have saved her. What a film of accident had hidden it from her! All was plain to her comprehension, and yet all was confused to her senses; she had not understood the details clearly, and yet she could not have endured Lawrence Daly's presence one more minute without losing her senses. She needed them more than ever now. What a small thing might have saved her, even the mention of the name of her brother's companion to her husband! At the thought of the old man the painful frown upon her set face deepened. She hated him now, she hated him in his grave—and of late she had forgotten him. She had been glad sometimes to feel that the remembrance of him did not trouble her—did not recur for many days together, and then but vaguely, and without bitterness. It returned now, when this dreadful blow fell upon her—this blow,

whose weight and terror she did not yet understand to the full—and with it the hate which she had believed was long since conquered. If he had not been so brutal, so sneering about her brother; if he had not shown such utter indifference to her feelings, such cold contempt for Walter; if he had not made him and his story a prohibited subject, all must have been revealed, and the man to whom he sought to make reparation discovered, in Walter's friend, who had saved Walter's life. But it was not reparation to Daly, but revenge on her, the old man had sought. When, in the torrent of her thoughts, this one rushed hot and bubbling to the surface, Miriam clasped her hands upon her head and groaned: "Revenge on me! Oh! my God! has he not had it?"

How nearly she had touched the truth, that night in Paris, when she had discovered

that Bianca had stolen the letter which Daly wrote to her for Walter! What was that he had said about the old man's second wife? "He had married again, this time a young wife, who knew nothing about me, whom he could not torment and rule through me, as he had tormented and ruled his first wife." And yet it was through Lawrence Daly he had tormented her, had driven her to the deed she had done. If he had given her back that letter on that night, and she had given him the explanation she had refused—what then? Ah! who could say? But, at least, not this horrible, hopeless, irremediable calamity.

He was Walter's friend, the man who had rescued him from ruin in London, the man who had saved his life in the Golden State—and Walter had for his sake, and under her instructions, robbed him of his inheritance. Robbed him! Yes. Miriam used

no palliative forms of expression now. What had become of her theory of the forgery? What had become of her argument that the felony was only a name, and she might offend against the formula of the law, while keeping its spirit uninjured, its intention undefiled? What extraordinary sudden enlightenment was this? Because Lawrence Daly was the injured man, and he her brother's friend, why should her mind undergo such a revolution as that implied in her recognition that her act of "simple justice, in self-defence," was an enormous crime? An "L—— D——" existed somewhere, she had always known, intended by her husband to be his heir, to her detriment and discomfiture. Had she not injured *him?* She had taken no thought of this; she was no more capable of abstract ideas than other women—if the philosophers who so complacently vivisect them be right. But

the truth which came to her in this dread shape—whence its form was derived she did not yet ask herself—she saw fully, knew through and through, and pressed its sharp arrows, with all the force of her will, into her conscience and her heart.

Unbounded horror, unspeakable remorse! These were the occupants of her soul, as Miriam sat by the fireside in her new home that day, on every side of her the signs and tokens of the wealth she loved, and had done this thing that she might have it and enjoy it. Remorse, not yet repentance. She had not yet come to see the wrong done to her own soul ; her mind was busy, to the point of exquisite torture, with her crime against this man—this man with the god-like smile, and the voice sounding as no other voice had ever sounded in her ears. What a terrible vindictive fate was hers, and with how sudden a rush it had come upon

her! Only a little while ago—the sun that had risen upon her sleepless anguish of expectation and fear had not yet gone down into twilight—and she had thought nothing could add to her grief for Walter and for Florence. And now? Now she was catching, wretch as she was, drowning in this sea of remorse and terror, at the shred of comfort supplied by Walter's loss of memory!

He would not remember when Lawrence Daly should have told him that the old man who had disappointed his hopes, and turned him adrift upon the world, was the same old man to whom his sister Miriam had sold herself for money (in her dismay, Miriam was quite merciless to herself, and would not take the mixed motives which had led to her marriage into account), that he had personated this old man, and forged a will in his name. The calamity which had come upon him would save him from any part of

what she was suffering, and always must suffer. What was that sound her lips had formed? "Thank God!" Was she then driven to such desperate straits that the affliction which had been to her "as a terror of great darkness," only a few hours ago, was turning to her sole source of consolation, her sole chance of endurance and concealment? Yes, it was even so; and while Miriam's heart ached with the thought, her judgment compassed the measure of her dismay and defeat by it.

Florence! Had she forgotten Florence, while she had thought that it was better her brother's intellect should be clouded, and his prime of manhood turned to helplessness and decay, than that he should know what he had done for her, in all its extent and its consequences? Had she forgotten Florence, for whom she had been suffering such agonising compassion? Yes, she had forgotten her

for awhile; but when she remembered her, she did not think differently. Something told her that if Walter had proved unable to keep the secret of their crime, as she had no doubt he would have proved when Daly's identity with the L—— D—— of the memorandum should have been revealed—the knowledge of it would have been far worse to Florence than the future with which she was threatened could ever be. She had interpreted Florence aright to Daly. While her husband *lived* and was *hers*, she would not be entirely unhappy. But, to know him for what he was, however plausibly extenuated, a felon, a forger, would break the heart that loved him, as surely as that heart was holy and pure. Then there tumbled into the torrent of her thoughts this importunate question: Why? She wanted to go on, to think about herself, to form some plan of action, but she could not. Why? What was

this which existed in Florence, and set her above the earthliness of love, while it kept fresh within her all its tenderness, and sweetness, and self-devotion? There was no answer yet, but it was to come to Miriam at no distant period.

Who shall tell the warfare of thought which raged within her tortured mind as she sat there, so still to all outward appearance? As well attempt to paint the forms, the motive, the fantastic fury of the storm-clouds when a hurricane is abroad, or the leaping of the waves it lashes. After a time she rose, and, pursued by a terrible perplexity, began to pace hurriedly up and down the room, like one lost, holding her head in her hands. The whole thing had suddenly become unreal, inexplicable, impossible to her. Had she done this deed? How had it come to pass that she had done it? She, a lady, educated and dwelling in decencies, to whom

the mere idea of deliberately breaking the law, rendering herself amenable to the penalties under which "common people" constantly fell, of committing a vulgar crime, was so impossible that, even when she had done it, it had not been, in her eyes, a vulgar crime, and she had never thought about the penalties. Could it be? Was it real? She leaned up against the wall breathless, and horrified, as the power of something external to herself came over her with full conviction, and she felt as one might feel who had committed a murder while walking in sleep, and awoke dabbled with the blood of the victim. Thus Miriam gained her first insight into the deadliness of temptation, learned the awful lurking possibilities of human nature, the terrible irrevocableness of an evil deed. "Dead is dead." And worse; she could not bury this dead thing—it was all around and about her, a maddening, haunting presence.

She did not know that its sepulture could be only when remorse should have changed to repentance.

In her hurried, distracted walk, she caught sight of a timepiece. Walter and Florence would arrive in half an hour. How she had dreaded that moment, which now she dreaded only lest she should not be able to control herself sufficiently to ward off suspicion! She went to her room, and her maid dressed her; and she agreed with Mrs. Haines that she was looking very pale and tired; and she went downstairs again, and received her brother and his wife with great self-command. But Florence thought her looking "shockingly ill;" and Mr. Martin, who came in the evening, reprimanded her sharply, and told her he had expected better things of her.

There was not much change in Walter. He was very dull, and indifferent, and sleepy.

But Miriam observed speedily that Florence was not altogether unconscious. She tried to rouse him, seemed anxious, watched him with sad eyes; and when he heard from Miriam—who had to strive fiercely for composure in telling him—that Lawrence Daly was in London, and would see him the following day, and only said "All right," appearing to forget it the next moment, she was quite evidently distressed. This was better; their task would be easier. That night Florence, pleading the fatigue of her journey, avoided seeing Miriam alone; and Miriam wrote to Lawrence Daly a few formal lines, inviting him to visit her brother and his wife on the following day. Then, for the first time in her life, she lay broad awake until the morning. There were to be many sleepless nights for Miriam, and long days of perplexity and suffering, before she learned to mourn, not that

her sin had "found her out," but that she had "done this great wickedness *against God.*"

"You would not deceive me, I am sure? You would not be persuaded that anything so cruel could be kind or just?" pleaded Florence to Mr. Martin and Lawrence Daly, many days later, when she had been told the truth, and when the fiat had gone forth that her Walter must be, for the few years he would probably have to live, one between whom and his kind there would be an increasing separation. She had borne it well, submissively, she who was so proud of him! But her mind was haunted by one fear, which she now sought to allay. Would they ever take him away from her? Would those doctors send him to strangers, to try for cure, who might indeed be very wise, and even gentle, but who would banish her

from him? She had avowed this fear to Mr. Martin and to Lawrence, to whom she clung with the old trust intensified a thousandfold. But they were now re-assuring her.

"Indeed, we would not deceive you, or consent to your being deceived," said Lawrence, pressing her patient hands in his, and looking through eyes dimmed with tears into her sweet, beseeching face. "You will never be asked to part with Walter; on the contrary, all our hope and trust are in you. He will never need any other care than yours, and it may be that will avail for a long time. Don't fear this, dear Florence; it will never befall you."

"Thank you," she said, turning her eyes first on him, and then on Mr. Martin, with submissive gratitude which wrung their hearts. "Then I can bear it very well. I could bear it, if God willed it, otherwise;

but I am very thankful that I may have my Walter with me; that He has made this light to me—so much lighter, I mean. And —and—I don't think he will ever be unhappy, for he will always, you know, be the same to his little world—to me and baby."

Then she left them, and went to him; and while the two men stood, unable to say to one another what was in their minds, Florence was kneeling beside her husband, with her arm encircling his head, as he slept the heavy sleep from which it was so difficult to rouse him, and her sweet lips murmuring, close to his changed face, delighted thanksgiving, as of a mother over her infant. Wonderful inarticulate words of love and prayer that, for the mind darkened upon the earth, the soul might be white before the Throne.

Walter, and Florence, and Miriam were

to go abroad soon, to certain baths in a remote part of Germany, which they were advised to try for Walter. He was quiescent and easily managed, but he displayed a growing disinclination for any society but that of Florence and his child. From the first, he took little notice of Daly; and gradually ceased to care for Miriam's presence. Florence remonstrated with her on her resolution to accompany them to Germany. Why should Miriam leave her new house, and change all her plan of life, to go with them? She knew it was to be with her; but how little they could be together! She should be always occupied with Walter; and Miriam must not think, while that was so, she ever could be unhappy. The innocent sufferer, she on whom the family calamity fell with all its weight, was supporting and comforting the other, out of the treasures of her self-devotion and of God's

grace. But Miriam was determined. If she were only to see Florence occasionally in the day, and to say "good morning" and "good night" to her, she would go. She cared nothing for her house now, and her plans of life were all laid aside.

Since their first interview, Miriam and Daly had never been alone together—this by Miriam's contrivance. So he had not been able to solve the mystery of her dismissal of him on that occasion, and the painful impression of it remained. He took infinite blame to himself for the manner in which he had told her his story; he had laid stress on the injuries Mr. St. Quentin had done him, and she, doubtless, thought he included the will in the category, whereas nothing had been farther from his intention. If he could have made her understand that the most he had expected, if he and Mr. St. Quentin had met, was a kindly recognition,

and that he regretted nothing but that he had not had the chance of shaking the old man's hand, and relegating bygones to the region of bygones. Had she suspected him of coming to her in the contemptible character of a complainant, of a disappointed expectant? If so, it must have been the fault of his own manner; and yet, the mere notion was somehow derogatory to her. How could she regard this old man's wealth as of such importance—to him, he meant, or to herself—as to give it such a place, in such an interview, under such circumstances? Why did she not regard the coincidence that there was a connecting link between her dead husband and her brother's friend as the trifling matter which, though interesting, it really was? He could not forget, though he would fain have forgotten, Walter's strictures upon Miriam's marriage, and upon her love of luxury, her over-estimate of

wealth. It must be some inexplicable feeling of this kind, some absurd, unworthy notion of a claim, or a censure upon her inheritance, which had caused her offence with him. Lawrence laughed at the idea, but the laugh was not genuine, and the annoyance was, and also keen.

He would explain himself fully, and rectify this, at the first opportunity; there must be nothing in his mind to dim the image he had set up there of Miriam. But she never gave him a chance. She met him with graceful coldness; her manner was perfect, and utterly wanting in all he desired to find in it, so that he asked himself if the frank confidence, the intimacy, the emotion which had characterised their first meeting, had existed in reality or in his presumptuous fancy? She treated him with the utmost courtesy, *as Walter's friend*, and never for one moment lowered the barrier between

him and herself, which rendered any recurrence to the circumstances of their first interview impossible. He was puzzled, disappointed, disheartened, and only the sad need in which Florence stood of his sympathy and help, and her perfect trust in him, hindered his taking an abrupt leave of them all, and returning at once to America.

Only slight reference was made to the relationship which had existed between Lawrence and Mr. St. Quentin. Walter had heard of it without interest, and soon apparently forgotten it, and Florence had said little about it. If he were not forced to believe that Miriam resented it, since she inexorably kept him at a distance, Daly might have thought she also had forgotten it. He saw her almost every day, and every day he felt that it would be better for him to see her no more. Fate had not been propitious to Lawrence Daly. Of all the

women in the world, his world at least, Miriam was the only one whom it was absolutely forbidden to him to love. He had never loved, never imagined that he loved any woman, until now. And now that one impossible, unattainable woman had taken such full, utter, immediate possession of his heart, and his soul and his senses, that all life to come must be one dead level of aimless endeavour, unprofitable labour, mere waste, because she would never love him, never belong to him! He was a strong man, reticent and brave, a man who knew how to take the training and punishment of life, as they ought to be taken by those who are going up higher to the guest-tables of the Master; but he winced, and writhed, and shuddered under the infliction of his fate. He knew the warp in her character, for he was not a blind lover,—of the kind who, when their eyes are opened, are most un-

reasonable tyrants to women,—but clear-sighted, who loved *her*, not a glorified fancy of her, and it made the circumstances more fatal than they must otherwise have been, had he entertained even the faintest hope that he might win her. How would she, warped as her mind was, by her false estimate and love of money, regard a profession of love on his part—he who would have been her husband's heir but for the will which gave all to her? Perhaps her cold, resolute avoidance was intended as an intimation to him that such an expedient for the remedy of his disappointment, in which it was plain she persisted in believing, was not within his reach.

When this suggested itself to him, Lawrence Daly's power of endurance ceased, and he resolved that, not even for the sake of Florence, would he remain longer in London. On the following day, he told Mrs.

St. Quentin and Florence that he was going to Liverpool on Friday—it was then Monday—and should sail for New York on Saturday. Florence dropped her needle-work, and began to cry; but Miriam, sitting idle, was quite unmoved.

"It must have come some time," he said, taking Florence's hand; "and you are going away so soon, it is but a few days earlier than you would have left *me*. You will send me good news from Germany; and next year, if things go well with me, I will come and see you." Not a word, not a look in all this was addressed to Miriam, who might not have heard it, so perfect was her composure.

"Yes, I know, Lawrence—and you are very kind—but, all seems to come at once—and——" Then Florence, for once unable to control herself, hurried out of the room. Lawrence fully expected that Miriam would

follow her. But Miriam sat, her gloomy eyes downcast, in perfect silence.

For only the second time in their lives these two were alone together. After several minutes of great embarrassment to Lawrence, Miriam said :

" I think, Mr. Daly, you told me you had a drawing of the place you and Walter lived at, and of your claim, at the gold mines— will you give me that drawing ?"

" Of course," said Lawrence, much surprised. " If you wish, I will give it you with pleasure. But it is a mere sketch— and——"

" Yes, you told me so. But I wish for it, and some day I mean to let Walter see it, and try whether any association with it exists in his mind. Don't be afraid of my doing anything rash ; I will watch for a good opportunity. Will you bring me the sketch to-morrow ?"

As she spoke she drew towards her the cabinet of ivory, silver, and ebony, which formerly stood in her boudoir in Paris, and unlocked it.

"I will give you an equivalent for your sketch, Mr. Daly," she continued, in a tone of even more than her customary coldness, as she drew out one of the drawers of the cabinet, and laid her hand on a miniature. "Look at that likeness. Of whom is it?"

He advanced, and took the portrait in his hands. "It is my aunt Kate."

"Mr. St. Quentin's first wife. It is yours. Don't thank me; this, at least, is your right. Or, if you will thank me, let it be in action." She locked the cabinet, pushed it from her, and rose. "Mr. Daly," she said, "I am the last person in the world who ought to ask a favour of you."

"But the first," he replied, earnestly, "to whom I would render one."

She bit her lip and frowned, and he took heed that she did so.

"I have a most particular, a most urgent reason for requesting you to defer your departure. I cannot explain it, I cannot even indicate it. We go to Germany this day fortnight. Will you, as the only service I shall ever ask of you, remain in England for the same space of time after we shall have gone?"

Her tone was impassive, but the look in her eyes made Lawrence her slave.

"I will," was all he said.

"And will you tell *no one* that you do so at my request?"

"I will tell no one."

Then she left him; and from that moment, until they exchanged a general farewell, she was never again alone with him. And poor Florence thought he had deferred his departure for her sake.

CHAPTER XIII.

"OUR CLIENT."

THE days before the parting passed away without any remarkable incident, until the last but one had arrived.

Walter, whom Miriam believed to be more conscious of his own state than the others supposed, had assented to the expedition to Germany, without expressing interest or curiosity. He was lying on a sofa in the drawing-room, alongside of a table covered with prints and portfolios of water-colour drawings, which it amused him to look at, when he was not too listless and sleepy to be amused by anything. Miriam

had been sedulously cultivating this taste of his for some time, and took care to have new prints, photographs, and various kinds of drawings provided for its gratification. On this day, Florence had gone out, about some final preparations, Miriam having promised to remain with Walter during her absence. He was rather fretful—an unusual symptom —and Miriam had to apply herself earnestly to the task of amusing him, and to withdraw her mind, by a strong effort, from its own thoughts and troubles.

She had placed some new specimens of photography, in a bright-coloured case, conspicuously within his reach, and after some time he noticed them. It was always vain to endeavour to force his attention; it must be suffered to take its own desultory course. He sat up, leaned his elbow on the table, and his head on his hand, and began to turn over the contents of the case. They were

landscape photographs, selected from striking scenes, and all quarters of the world. Miriam, pretending to be busy with some needlework, watched him intently. His face was less vacant than usual; there was more purpose in his eyes.

"Sand," he said, half aloud, "and great blocks of building—the Pyramids, I suppose." He looked long at each, and laid them by with care, but without reading the inscriptions on the back. "Great trees, branches high up, and huge stems, and a sheet of white water. They can't bring water out rightly, except the still, deep pools. The sea and the moon—only the two of them, alone—I have seen them so, except for our speck of a ship, and neither of them minded that, I should think, and I have seen the sand-plains too."

Miriam laid aside her work and softly drew nearer to him.

"A great desert place, and a dead camel, plenty of bones about—I have seen something like that too.—What's this? Not a photograph. How has it got in here, among the photographs? Miriam!"

"Yes, dear——"

"Look at this. This is a drawing—a pencil drawing: it has no business here, you know."

She came to his side, and looked at it.

"I know this place too," he continued. "This is the turn, round the edge of the bluff, as you came up from the valley; and there's the hut, and the great rock on the creek." He pointed to each spot on the drawing in turn, as he named it, and there was a gleam of the old brightness in his changed face.

She listened, following his hand.

"There's the ravine. Do you see this little path up the face of it, and those two

rocks? I could not climb up there now, Miriam, and I could not scramble up on that rock" (he put his finger on it), "with the other just over my head" (he put his finger on that too), "as I did then."

"What did you do it for, Walter? Were you looking for gold in the rocks in the face of the ravine?"

"No, no," he answered, testily; "I was not looking for gold there. There isn't any. I don't know why I climbed up between the two rocks, but Daly knows."

"Did you hurt yourself? Did you fall?"

"No. Why should I fall? It was a safe place." He laid the drawing aside, took up one of the photographs, and went on looking at it, and talking to himself about it. Miriam removed the drawing, on the pretext that it ought not to be among the photographs, and carefully stuck a large pin into the spot which Walter had indicated.

Lawrence Daly and Mr. Martin dined at Mrs. St. Quentin's house that evening. After dinner, Miriam showed Lawrence the drawing, pierced by a pin, and told him how she had tried this experiment. She repeated to him exactly what Walter had said, and added: "Whether I have succeeded or not —whether his memory, faintly aroused, is true or false, I cannot tell or guess. We shall never have any clearer indication than this."

Lawrence looked long at the drawing. "You have done this very ingeniously," he said. "I have not the least doubt that in that spot Walter hid the nugget. Perhaps I shall go in search of it some day, when I need not care about it, or about finding that it has been washed away into some other hiding-place by the flood, there to lurk for thousands of years more, until, it may be, a race shall possess the earth who will not set any store on nuggets."

Then they talked no more about it; and Miriam, seeing that he cared little for this clue, and did but assume an interest, that he might not seem indifferent to the effort she had made, wondered why it was so.

They were to part that night. Miriam, Florence, and Walter were to begin their journey early on the following morning. Florence and Daly talked for some time together, apart from the others, and then Daly came forward, while Florence left the room, to take leave of Miriam. The one was as cold, as constrained as the other.

"I hope to see you again next year," said Lawrence, "and to find things better. Good-bye."

"I have your promise, Mr. Daly—you remain in England for one fortnight from to-morrow. We—we may have to send for you, you know—if Walter should not bear the journey well."

"I trust there is no danger of that; but you may rely on my promise. Once more, good-bye."

If she could have trusted herself to meet his eyes, she must have read in them that he loved her, and have been made—what she believed impossible—more wretched than she then was. But she did not look at him; she only gave him a cold, impassive hand for a moment, and, to his "Good-bye," replied, "Farewell."

Miriam left her home with the feeling of one driven away from paradise, after a glimpse of the radiant wonders within its gates. What dross had she been taking for gold all her life until now!—what a vain shadow had she been walking in!—how hollow had been her assurance of peace, where there was no peace!—how base, poor, utterly foolish her ambition! And this was not the worst of it—oh! how far

it was from being the worst! This might have been set right; she might have learned the truth, and put away her delusion for ever; she might have arisen from it purified, ennobled, but for the base and hateful sin which had sullied her soul! To stand a criminal before the man she loved, the man who had taught her what was the meaning of life to women who were not such wretches as she—a vile thief, who had robbed him, to feel that the only misfortune which could be added to her destiny would be his love, which she might once have blamelessly tried to win by every harmless woman's art—this was her punishment! On her knees, in the dead hours of the night, with eyes which could weep no more, with clasped hands and bowed-down head, she acknowledged its justice. It never could be lessened; the sentence against her never could be repealed; and with her sense of the depth of

her sin, there must ever grow her comprehension of its astounding folly. Her choice had indeed, like Esau's, been "profane."

The travellers set forth on their journey; and Miriam's fine new house—the decorations on the walls and ceilings were hardly dry, and much of the furniture was not unpacked—went into the dingy livery of an "out-of-town" family's mansion, when all London was in the full tide of its life, in the early Summer. Lawrence Daly went every day to look at it, while he was waiting for the expiration of the fortnight during which he had promised to remain in England. One night, very late, in a fit of restlessness, he took his way to Lowndes Square, and fell to studying the house after a manner which made it fortunate for him there was no active and intelligent policeman in sight. It was after all reasonable hours for any light to be visible in the basement story, or

at the top of the house, where only, under present circumstances, lights ought ever to have been seen. And yet there was a light in Miriam's boudoir, and the window-sash was open, with the curtains drawn behind it. Daly watched the light, but no figure passed between it and the window. After some time it vanished; and then, in the darkness, he heard the window shut and barred.

"A servant, I suppose," thought Lawrence, as he turned away, "trying what it feels like to sit in a boudoir, and keep fashionable hours."

The following day brought Lawrence Daly a letter, from Messrs. Ross and Raby, solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn, to the effect that they had been instructed by their client, Mrs. St. Quentin, to request him to meet a representative of the firm at her house, in Lowndes Square, on the earliest day which

it would suit his convenience to name, for the purpose of receiving from them, on her behalf, a communication of importance.

So, then, he was to learn the meaning of the promise she had exacted from him. But he was not to learn it from herself, and he felt but a languid curiosity respecting its interpretation. He wanted to get away. He believed that he should conquer the vain longing for a love that never could be his by change of scene and the resumption of his roving habits. This is a notion which men entertain more commonly and more successfully than women. Miriam had no such hope to sustain her; but she had not the wish either. She would not have loved him less if she could; in her great punishment was her only consolation.

Lawrence replied to Messrs. Ross and Raby that he would be at Mrs. St. Quentin's house at noon the next day, and passed the

intervening time in vague and vain conjectures. He kept his appointment punctually, and found Mr. Ross, a clean-shaven, pompous gentleman, and Mr. Clissold, already arrived. The three gentlemen met in the dining-room, a large and handsome apartment, which had been apparently taken out of curl-papers for the occasion. A japanned box, of imposing dimensions, occupied a conspicuous place on the centre table, and two large plate-chests stood in a window. A flat leather-bound book, marked "Inventories," lay beside the japanned box; and a mass of keys, with ivory labels attached to them, completed the accessories of a scene entirely inexplicable to Lawrence. He had entered the house with a faint, irrational hope that Miriam might be there—he felt how absurd it was to suppose she would return suddenly from Germany, and, if she had done so, that there should be any mys-

tery about it—and yet he was keenly disappointed when the two strangers only met him. The first formal civilities over, Mr. Ross proceeded to discuss the business on which they had come. Mr. Daly was already aware that he was charged with an important communication to him, on the part of Mrs. St. Quentin, and he would make it as briefly as might be.

"You are a relative of the late Mr. St. Quentin?"

"I am."

"His nearest relative, and his heir-at-law?"

"I am."

"Mrs. St. Quentin ascertained, after her late husband's death, that he had been endeavouring to find his heir-at-law. Some memoranda fell into her hands, showing that he had set on foot inquiries with that purpose, and if he had succeeded, he would

have bequeathed to his heir-at-law, yourself, his entire property, with the exception of an annuity of two hundred pounds to her, for her lifetime."

"Impossible!" interrupted Lawrence; "he could not have had any such intention. He never——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Daly," continued Mr. Ross, gravely checking him by an impressively uplifted forefinger. "There is no doubt at all that the late Mr. St. Quentin *did* entertain this purpose. Why he should have changed it so shortly before his decease, it is impossible to tell; but Mrs. St. Quentin believes it was because a letter which you wrote to him, announcing your intention of coming to England, did not reach him, and therefore he suspected the person who professed to have gained information about you—a person named Deering—was imposing upon him, and that you had

not really been found. When Mrs. St. Quentin passed through Paris the other day, she had an interview with Monsieur Caux, an agent who had acted for Mr. St. Quentin, and whom you saw, I think?"

"Yes, I saw Monsieur Caux," said Lawrence, quite bewildered.

"He confirmed Mrs. St. Quentin's previous impressions, by his account of Mr. St. Quentin's last interview with him, and he gave her this letter, which you will recognise." Mr. Ross handed to Lawrence his own letter to Mr. St. Quentin, which had not reached its destination for months after it was written. Lawrence glanced at it, and handed it to him again.

"Under these circumstances," resumed Mr. Ross, with added pomposity of manner, "Mrs. St. Quentin, having become convinced that this accidental delay, leading Mr. St. Quentin to believe he had been deceived,

constituted in reality his sole reason for making a will in her favour, as he did—Mr. Clissold drew up the instrument"—Mr. Clissold, sedulously fitting his finger-tips together, as he sat by the table, with his elbows upon it, bowed—"a very short time before his decease, and that his own views and wishes, but for this accidental delay, would have remained unaltered, has renounced the legacy in your favour."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Lawrence, pushing back his chair, and starting to his feet. "It cannot be. This is an absurd, a fatal delusion. Nothing on earth should induce me to listen to such a thing! Why should he not have left all his property to his wife, under any circumstances?"

"We cannot enter into that question," said Mr. Ross; "we have only to state our client's views and intentions. Mrs. St. Quentin instructed us some time ago, and

last Tuesday executed a deed of gift in your favour: here is a copy of it,"—he raised the lid of the box, and indicated a folded paper —"having returned from Germany for the purpose. By this instrument she conveys to you absolutely the whole of the property bequeathed to her by Mr. St. Quentin, and of which we are prepared to give you all particulars, with the exception of a sum of five thousand pounds, deposited in the Bank of France."

"And do you suppose, for a moment, gentlemen, that I shall accept this—this unheard-of sacrifice from Mrs. St. Quentin, from a lady who owes me no consideration whatever? I cannot assure you emphatically enough that I had *no* expectations whatever from Mr. St. Quentin, and that in no communication which passed between his agent and Mr. Deering, or myself, did he give the slightest indication of an intention

to do anything for me. I give you my word of honour, I had no hopes, no disappointments in connection with this matter."

"As I said before, Mr. Daly, we cannot enter into this portion of the subject. I have now fulfilled Mrs. St. Quentin's instructions. It only remains for me to say that Mr. Clissold will go into particulars with you. There are complete inventories of all plate and other valuables in this house, and also in the apartment in Paris; Mr. Clissold will hand over the leases and other documents; and, as I have another engagement, I will now take my leave."

"Stay one moment," said Lawrence. "I am quite unfit to speak of this now; I am astonished, shocked beyond measure! I must see Mrs. St. Quentin without an hour's delay. Where is she? She has been here in this house, has she not?"

"She was here for three days," replied

Mr. Ross, "making these final arrangements. But she left England yesterday morning."

"To return to Germany! To her brother and his wife?"

"I really cannot tell you, Mr. Daly—I do not know. Mrs. St. Quentin did not furnish us with any address. Her business with us is all completely and most satisfactorily wound up, and we know nothing further about her."

"But you will continue to act for me?" asked Lawrence, eagerly. "You will consider me your client?" Mr. Ross signified that Ross and Raby would be very happy to do so. "And you will bear in mind that I distinctly refuse to accept this deed of gift; and that, if I accept the temporary care and management of Mrs. St. Quentin's property, it is only in the character of her representative, and in her interests."

"Very good," replied Mr. Ross; "that is a matter for your own decision entirely." And then he took leave of Lawrence, who remained with Mr. Clissold, surrounded by the signs and tokens of his astounding and unwelcome change of fortune.

Mr. Clissold proceeded to detail the particulars and the dispositions of all this wealth —of which Lawrence had so often thought, in old times, with curiosity, doubtless, and some little envy—in his dry, dull, and business-like fashion; and Lawrence listened, with his mind in great perplexity. Every trivial incident of his first interview with Miriam returned to him, and, feeling that there was a contrast, never lessened and never relaxed, between her reception of him, and her manner to him, from the moment in which he revealed his identity until that of their parting, he vaguely scented a mystery beyond the already mysterious circum-

stances in which he stood. This absolute renunciation of the wealth she loved, and had bought at such a price, on the romantic plea of carrying out the supposed intentions of a man who had contradicted that supposition in the most positive manner by a will in which no name but her own was mentioned, was wholly inconsistent with Miriam's character, as he knew it, by report and by experience.

Among the objects of value in the room was one to which Mr. Clissold directed Lawrence's attention in its turn. This was a strong teak box, containing a quantity of gold and silver plate, and articles of ornament of fine Indian workmanship. Three trays, lined with cloth, contained these precious things, fitted into sockets; and Lawrence turned them over with some curiosity, until he came to a space, like that into which a looking-glass is usually fitted in the

lid of a dressing-case, and which was occupied by a portrait on ivory, in a very elaborate gold frame.

This portrait, evidently the work of a native artist, represented a good-looking elderly man, and was, in fact, that of Mr. St. Quentin, as Lawrence knew, from its likeness to a photograph which he had seen in Florence's book. Mr. Clissold admired the frame, commented upon the combined richness and roughness of the workmanship, and said:

"One of the family, I suppose?"

"Mr. St. Quentin himself," said Daly.

"Oh! no," said Mr. Clissold. "Didn't you know Mr. St. Quentin?"

"I never saw him."

"I saw him just before he died, you know. He did not look so ill, either, considering. But that's nothing, I'm told, in cases like his; they pop off in a minute, when they're

seemingly all right. But he was not the least like that. Different complexion, different eyes. Blue eyes he had, and a pale skin, and didn't look within ten years, even then, of the age of that picture. What's this? A pipe bowl and stem, with turquoise tassels. Beautiful, ain't they?" Mr. Clissold clicked his boots together under the table, in his admiration, and went on to the other rare and costly objects, unconscious that Lawrence was staring stupidly at the picture, a faint dread, without form or consistence, stirring at his heart.

When Mr. Clissold's task was concluded, and he had left him, Lawrence summoned the housekeeper, who had been, he found, prepared by Miriam for his probably coming to reside in the house. He told her he should only occupy the rooms on the ground floor, and that the remainder of the house must remain shut up for the present. After

another interview with Mr. Ross, Daly left England for Germany.

"Do you really, seriously mean that you think Mrs. St. Quentin has done right, Florence, in bestowing upon me wealth which I don't want, and which I won't use, in departing utterly from the—her husband's specific directions—never mind his intentions; *the will is a fact*—and in abandoning all her duties, in the way she has done?"

"I not only think she has done right, but I cannot for a moment imagine Miriam's acting in any other way, when she discovered that Mr. St. Quentin would have made a different will, had he known what she came to know."

"And yet this same woman, with this far-fetched sense of honour, and extraordinary delicacy of conscience, married Mr. St. Quentin for the sake of his money, which

she relinquishes for a scruple like this!"

"That is true," said Florence, little thinking what a truth she was uttering; "but Miriam sees things, Miriam understands right and wrong, far differently now."

"Well, you women are incomprehensible. You, too, are against me. I will say no more about this: I shall never abandon my search for her, never abandon my hope of finding her. Walter, you tell me, is in ignorance of all this."

"Yes," she answered, with a heavy sigh. "It would have been useless to tell him. He could not have understood it."

"No, indeed, nor any one else."

"Do be persuaded. Let Miriam's intentions be fulfilled. So long as you do not accept it, fully and frankly, you will make her wretched, and part us from her, for she will never put herself within reach of seeing you until you have done so."

"It is in vain to try to persuade me, Florence; I am much more resolute in my purpose than she in hers, though she thinks she has made it irrevocable—stronger by all the added strength of my motive."

She looked surprised, but asked no question. He continued.

"You persist in refusing to tell me where she is?"

"Yes, I persist. I promised her. I cannot break faith with Miriam."

"She will not remain long away from you. Mind, I warn you, I will have your house watched."

She smiled faintly. "I am not at all afraid of your doing anything of the kind."

Shortly after, they parted, and Florence wrote to Miriam a full account of the interview.

"Never mind, dearest Florence"—so ran Miriam's reply. "I only ask a year's se-

crecy; and, if a woman's influence should intervene before, not even that. If he falls in love and marries, or intends to do so, I need not care how soon after he finds me out. Hiding is *so* easy. He never saw me except in my weeds; I have laid them aside; and he passed me yesterday on the platform at London Bridge—*the* platform, Florence, where you and I parted with Walter—so close, I had barely time to put my veil down."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE ROCKS.

TO search for a person who has a strong motive for concealment, without any such previous knowledge of that person's tastes and habits as would supply a "system" on which to work, is not an easy or promising undertaking. Miriam had no friends in London, and Lawrence had no knowledge of her mode of life in Paris to supply him with data for his pursuit. The servants left in the house in Lowndes Square were all strangers; and Monsieur Caux, to whom Lawrence applied, was entirely unacquainted with Mrs. St. Quentin's habits or

associates. He had seen her only once—on the occasion of his giving her Lawrence's own letter; and he knew nothing, except that he had been employed against her interests, and that he did not gather from her manner that she resented that circumstance.

To his first attempt, by letter, to induce Florence to reconsider her resolution, Lawrence received a reply which made him desist. If he made any further reference to the subject, Florence must close their correspondence, and she begged him to spare her so great a sacrifice. If Lawrence had not had lurking, in the unexplored recesses of his mind, something which was, and yet was not, a suspicion of the truth, an impression which he would not investigate, and could not banish, he might not have shrunk, as he did, from the employment of any other person's services in this matter. He had indeed

no right to set detectives on the track of a lady in no way bound to admit him to her presence, if she chose to hold herself aloof from him; and yet she might have yielded to the temptation to do so, trusting to her pardon, if he had not been tormented by a vague surmise that there was in this mysterious restitution and disappearance something more than the avowed motive. The last person who had seen Mr. St. Quentin alive had not recognized the portrait which Lawrence knew to be that of Mr. St. Quentin, and that person had drawn up Mr. St. Quentin's will! What did all this point at? He dreaded to ask the question of himself, he dreaded the answer. There was a method by which he felt certain he could force Miriam to communicate with him, to come out of her concealment at all events for once. It was by putting an advertisement in the *Times*, addressed to the persons who witnessed the

will of the late Mr. St. Quentin. But he could not do this. It was too near to the half-uttered whisper of the truth within him; it might possibly involve Miriam in danger, disgrace—and he loved her!

Lawrence went to Doctors' Commons and read the will. There was nothing to be learned from that. He went to Dover, and found that the head-waiter, who was one of the witnesses, was still there. He was easily induced to talk of the old gentleman who died at the hotel so very unexpectedly, to the dismay of the proprietor, and of the beautiful lady who had so much courage and presence of mind. He recollected the witnessing of the will perfectly, and that the gentleman did seem very ill indeed, though not so bad as to prepare anyone for what had happened. There was only one circumstance connected with the event which no one thought of mentioning, and which had

never come to Lawrence's knowledge. This was the visit of Mrs. St. Quentin's brother to the hotel, just before the death of her husband. So trifling a fact did not hold a place in anyone's mind, and thus the clue escaped Lawrence's grasp. He had taken the Indian portrait of Mr. St. Quentin to Dover, and displayed it conspicuously in his sitting-room. The head-waiter was looking curiously at the frame while he was answering Daly's questions, but without the slightest recognition of the face. His silence was enough for Lawrence; he would not ask him a needless question.

After this, great discouragement fell upon Lawrence. He was not a man to grow morbidly weary of his life because its lines had not been laid as he would have had them; but he felt the position in which Miriam's unaccountable rashness had placed him false and irksome. The influence of

the man who had made his youth desultory, and dependent, and unsatisfactory, was still pursuing him, and his future threatened to be as desultory and as unsatisfactory as his past.

Why should he not go away, and give it all up, putting his affairs into the hands of Messrs. Ross and Raby, letting the London house, and leaving the money, which had hitherto done no one any good, to accumulate until such time as he could entirely solve the mystery, or Miriam should have come to her right mind? Here was an easy way out of all his difficulties, and into some new mode of life, which should dissipate the dreariness and perplexity in which he was living; with only one drawback to it, one little objection, which neutralised every advantage. He loved Miriam, and no life unshared by her could be any more bearable than this, into which there was,

after all, a chance that she might come some day.

Lawrence went to the Firs, and wandered all over the empty rooms, and all the places which Walter used to talk about, and with which Miriam was associated. No one there could tell him anything about Mrs. St. Quentin, when he inquired in a casual way. There was a story afloat that another will had been found, and that Miriam had been dispossessed; and, as no one in the neighbourhood knew the particulars of Mr. St. Quentin's death except Mr. Martin, who did not think proper to repeat them, the explanation was accepted. Lawrence staid two days at Mr. Martin's house, and had no reason to suspect that he was better informed concerning Miriam's place of abode than himself. One suggestion, not directly bearing on the subject, but which had an attraction for him, Mr. Martin made. It was in

speaking of Miriam's girlhood, and the many adverse influences which had warped her character, originally noble, as her act of restitution, however ill-judged and excessive, proved, that Mr. Martin said: "That Miss Monitor was an honest sort of person enough. I don't like schoolmistresses in general, and I think they can hardly be disinterested, under a special miracle; but she was a good friend to Miriam, on the whole."

"Of course she does not know where she is?"

"I should suppose she does not. Miriam would naturally calculate upon your going to her in the first instance, and she would hardly burden her with such a confidence. Quite enough to impose it on Florence, I should say."

Miriam would naturally calculate upon his going to Miss Monitor in the first instance! And he had not done so, and it

had never occurred to him! He did not say so to Mr. Martin, but he determined the next day should find him at Blackheath. He had a kindly recollection of Miss Monitor. Suppose the good-natured, cheery old maid were to find out his secret? What then? He was so solitary and so miserable, he hoped she would, or that she would give him some encouragement to reveal it to her. At least there would be some one to whom he might talk of Miriam.

Miss Monitor's cottage at Blackheath was a pretty little dwelling, full of nooks and crannies, which were all filled with appropriate furniture, and it combined a delightful appearance of age with every modern convenience, and no small degree of elegance and refinement. The rooms opened into one another, and the longest flight of stairs in the building numbered only ten low broad steps. The prevailing tints of the

furniture and hangings were warm reds and cool greens, and all the ornaments were of a quaint simple fashion; with one exception, which caught Lawrence's eye as soon as he was ushered into Miss Monitor's drawing-room, apparently to the displeasure of a very handsome grey parrot, whose cage stood at the open glass door-window leading into the secluded and richly-cultivated garden, fenced off by a wire railing from the field sacred to Miss Monitor's cow. This exception was a cabinet of ebony, ivory, and silver, much too splendid for its surroundings, and which Lawrence instantly remembered to have seen—where? Surely it had stood on a table in Miriam's drawing-room, and Miriam had touched it on that first day! He was looking at the cabinet, full of reminiscences, when the servant who had ushered him into the drawing-room returned, and, with much confusion and

trepidation, informed him that she had been mistaken in telling him that her mistress, Miss Monitor, was at home. She was not aware of it, but Miss Monitor had gone out, and was not expected to return until evening. The girl spoke hurriedly, and held the door wide open, to intimate that the intruder was expected to take his departure instantly. But this did not suit Lawrence's views. "I had something important to say to Miss Monitor," he observed: "since I cannot see her, I will write it." Then he seated himself at a writing-table, opposite the open glass door, and began to write, while the unhappy parlour-maid looked on helplessly, the very image of misery and irresolution.

Presently, Lawrence heard a step upon the walk outside the window, and paused for a moment. It was a loitering, proprietorial step, and the two handsome Skye

terriers, who lay close to the window-sill, in amiable proximity to the parrot, did not stir or bark. There was a snipping sound, as of the person outside cutting flowers from their stems, and presently a woman stood in the open doorway, arrested by the sight of the man at the table, and from whose unnerved hands tumbled down a basket of gorgeous roses, which fell into the parrot's cage, and on to the dogs' noses, and all over the carpet. Then the parlour-maid shut the door, and fled; and Lawrence looked up, and saw —Miriam!

Yes, Miriam, whom he had been seeking vainly, and who had been, all these months, within his reach!—Miriam, more beautiful than he had ever seen or imagined her!—Miriam, in whose face he read, even in the instant before she turned and rushed away, something more than surprise and fear, something very different from horror. She

rushed away; but in an instant Lawrence followed her, came up with her at the wire paling, seized her by the wrists, and fairly dragged her, with the force and determination of any savage, minded that his prey shall not escape him, inside the glass door. Until then, neither spoke; but when he had pulled her in, and stood, still holding her fast, he said one word to her—

"Miriam!"

"Let me go instantly, Mr. Daly! How dare you?" she gasped.

He loosed her wrists; he stood in the doorway, and he answered her: "How dare *you* do what you have done to me for many a day? How dare *you* make me so miserable, and condemn me to a false position, to satisfy your own pride, or your own fancy?"

"I did not," she replied solemnly, and recovering her self-possession completely.

"It was neither my pride nor my fancy which dictated what I have done."

"Then tell me what it was."

"You have no right to command me in that tone. The explanation I gave you is the true explanation. From the resolution I then made, you shall never move me. By what right do you question me further?"

"I will tell you presently. Sit there." He placed a chair for her; she took it mechanically; and he stood before her, not releasing her for a moment from his gaze. "You have to answer me some questions first. Where have you been since you returned from Germany, and since you sent your lawyers to me with your absurd story about Mr. St. Quentin's intentions?"

"It—it was not absurd," she faltered.

"It was; and it was cruel—cruel to yourself and to me. But that is not my question. Where have you been?"

"Here."

"Here! Good heavens! so near me, when I have been wearying my soul with conjecture, and sickening my heart with hope, always cheated and deferred! Thank God, at length, at last, for its realization!"

She looked at him with timid surprise; she blushed and trembled.

"I see—I know why you did this: being so simple, and so audacious, you calculated, rightly, that I should never think of it. And now I have found you."

"You shall not make me stay here. I will go away. You have no right to pursue me, Mr. Daly. I am free to do as I choose, and to decline such acquaintances as I think fit."

She was making a very poor fight of it—and she knew it. This was the most wretched, the most contemptible of shams! What would you have? Here was a guilty

woman, who had laid all her own life waste, struggling in the strong grasp of her first love, in the presence of the man from whom she had fled, because he it was whom she had wronged, and she had learned that he was her master.

"You are *not* free," he replied; "at least you are not free *from me!* And I will tell you why, Miriam, and in doing so, I will answer the question you asked me just now: 'What right have I?' I will tell you why. It is because you have bound me to you, and thus cannot be free yourself! It is because no will of yours, no flight of yours, can sever me from you! It is because I love you, Miriam, absorbingly, devotedly, as I have loved you since I saw you, as I believe I loved you before I ever saw you, and because I will win you—you who, I know, have never loved—if it is in love, or man, to win woman!"

She shrank back in her chair, and put her hand out to keep him away. Her eyes closed—a strong shudder ran through her frame; she made a desperate effort—an effort which frightened him—to keep from fainting. At length she stammered out—

"Oh, my God! Can it be? You do not know what I am."

"I do. I know you are the queen of all women to me, the one woman in all the world; my love, my life! Miriam! listen to me; don't reject me—don't tell me the hope that has stirred my heart since I saw your dear eyes shining on me yonder, is a delusion like all my life hitherto—the hope that you might come to love me!"

Her hands were clasped over her face now, and he gently tried to remove them. But she rose, suddenly slipped by him, and stood upright, looking steadily at him, between him and the door.

"Hush!" she said, almost in a whisper, and with one hand pressed heavily on her breast, as she steadied herself by catching the mantelpiece with the other, in the well-remembered attitude of their first interview.

"Do not say what I must not hear; do not say what it will break my heart to remember. You do not know, you cannot conceive, how you are torturing me, how utterly beaten, defeated, a wretch I am! There is no escape for me now." She was growing calmer with every word, and here her eyes shone with the fire of a desperate resolution. "You, and yet not you, but my fate, and God's eternal, immutable justice, have hunted me down at last! I have repented, but it does not avail; I have made restitution, but it is not enough; I must make confession too, and be for ever in your eyes what I am in my own."

"Miriam! Great heaven! what can you

mean? What can you be in my eyes but the best beloved among women?"

Again she waved him off, and something supremely mournful and majestic, in her gesture held him motionless.

"I can be what I am, a woman degraded from her place among women by a base, low, and treacherous crime—a woman who is an undetected felon, at your mercy from this moment."

Over his face there flickered the light of a sudden, terrible perception.

"Who do you think it was that robbed you—not unconsciously, for there was no unconsciousness, save that L—— D—— meant Walter's friend; Lawrence Daly—who do you think it was who did that, and did it by an act of unparalleled treachery? Who do you think it was that signed Mr. St. Quentin's will?"

"I don't know, Miriam," answered Law-

rence Daly, in a low, resolute voice, and made two steps towards her; "and I don't care. It was not Mr. St. Quentin; I have known that a long time."

"What! You knew!"

"Yes, I knew; and now, if you have anything more to tell me, you must tell it thus."

She was clasped in his strong arms, she, that tall, well-grown, grand woman, in an embrace which made her feel as small as a child, as weak as a reed, and yet filled her with an awful joy, and a sudden glorious fear, as of one—she thought afterwards, when thought could take form in her mind—who wakes in heaven. Her head was bent back by the clasp of his arms around her figure; and his kisses, full of mercy and of love, stifled the sobs which shook her convulsively, as his lips gathered the tears from her eyelids, and his long

silken beard hid her face from him. There was no need for Miriam's conqueror to ask the lover's question. Lawrence Daly never did, in fact, then or afterwards, ask her if she loved him. There was utter surrender in the first helpless sob which heaved up her heart against his breast, and in the quick shudder with which she nestled there.

Visitors are plenty in the Golden State of late; mere tourists, people who do not come thither to toil, or to barter, or to gamble, but merely to see one of the grandest and most beautiful countries on the face of the glorious earth, to breathe the most delicious air, to realise for once that there is a land in which mere animal living is delightful. The romance of danger, difficulty, toil, and wild adventure is indeed all but gone, but the memory of it is fresh, and many are the visitors now, brought thither commodiously

by the giant railway, who have trod the plains, and toiled through the wilderness in the old time. Among the number of these, last year, was Lawrence Daly. He was accompanied by Miriam. He had said to her once that, when the great railroad which was to join the Atlantic and the Pacific together was completed, he would re-visit the Golden State. And now she was there with him, the happiest of women, as she told herself many times a day, wondering humbly at the great rescue that had come to her, and striving that her life should bear fruits meet for so real a repentance as hers. She had never ceased to marvel at Lawrence's love, and she had once told him so, venturing to touch the margin of a forbidden subject, by saying: "It is so wonderful—though you know quite the worst of me."

"*Though*—or—*because?*" asked Lawrence,

with that slow, gradually beaming, beautiful smile of his, which never lost its fascination for Miriam.

She enjoyed this long and varied journey to the full; and her expectation, her revelling by anticipation in sentiment and association, were at the full, when they reached the scene of the long companionship of Lawrence and Walter. Even the remembrance of Walter's feeble state could not obscure Miriam's pleasure. At least, he and Florence were happy, she and Lawrence knew.

The settlement was a busy, populous, thriving place now, with a town where the huts had stood in the valley, and a goodly row of stores occupying the site of the one emporium of the days of Lawrence and Walter, with constituted authorities, and many places of good entertainment for man and beast, and one splendid hotel, to which the English party betook themselves. They

arrived at night; but an early hour next morning found Lawrence and Miriam following, on foot, the windings of the valley in the direction of the lone hut. Lawrence had already inquired into the alterations made by the course of the famous flood, and was not surprised to learn that the lone hut, well remembered as the scene of the murder of Spoiled Five—to whose grave he led Miriam during their walk—had been partially destroyed by the rush of the water through the ravine and over the face of the great rock. It had been considered hazardous to reconstruct a dwelling in the same situation, and such remains as the flood had spared had been carried away piecemeal. When Lawrence and Miriam rounded the bluff, and came in sight of the stone plateau on which the hut had stood, there was not a trace that it had ever existed.

They approached the place in silence, and

stood silent for several minutes, gazing upwards at the rock and the grand sweep of the ravine.

"The hut stood just here," said Daly at length.

"It is all exactly like your drawing," said Miriam, whose eyes were full of tears, easy to be understood. "There is no change at all, is there, except the hut being gone?"

"I don't observe any.—Yes, I do, though. Look there, Miriam, to the right, up along the face of the ravine, at the exact spot where you put the pin in my drawing, where Walter showed you the burial-place of the nugget. Are you following my directions? Yes! Then look; do you not see something which contradicts the sketch?"

Miriam shaded her eyes from the glorious Californian sunshine, and looked eagerly in the direction which he indicated.

"I think I see what you mean," she said. "In the drawing there is a space between those two stones, which lie one over the other there, in the ravine."

"Exactly. Yet I know I drew their relative position correctly, and Walter confirmed it by pointing out to you the space between them. That is, of course, one result of the flood, and would confirm me in my belief, if it required confirmation, that our nugget was not stolen, but swept away by the waters. The undermining of the earth between the upper and lower rock has brought the upper one down on it."

"What a pity the gold should have been lost! I don't mean to us," she added hastily. "We have more than enough of all the world can give, but generally speaking."

"Yet," said Lawrence, "that nugget was unfortunate treasure-trove to us. It is as well as it is. You won't mind waiting here,

Miriam, while I climb up that path, and take a look at the place? I want to see whether there is any spot from which a man standing on the rock, under the edge of the ravine, can be seen. I have always suspected that Walter was watched that morning, intentionally or unintentionally, and that poor Spoiled Five was murdered, not by men who came for the gold to the hut, but by men who came in the night to the place where Walter had hidden it.

"Is it dangerous climbing, Lawrence? Is there any risk of your slipping?"

"Not the least, dear. I have not forgotten all the arts of a wild life, if there were."

He collected some loose stones into a tolerably convenient seat for her, and ran aross the plateau, was then concealed from her sight for a few minutes, and emerged, scrambling up the face of the ravine.

Miriam watched him intently, following

every movement of his alert, active figure with loving eyes, and a heart filled with countless and contending feelings. Once or twice he stopped, and waved his hand, and called to her, his voice easily distinct in the pure sparkling air. She saw him spring at a tuft of brushwood, and swing himself up on the projecting edge of the lower rock, and then she saw him stoop, kneel, lie down on the flat surface, and lay his head upon it, apparently peering eagerly into the crevices of its junction with the superincumbent mass of the upper rock. She saw him, clinging to the stone he lay on with one hand, plunge the other, and his arm up to the elbow, into a crevice, which she could not see. He remained in that attitude for some minutes, then withdrew his hand; but she could not discern whether he held anything in it. Then he raised himself, and, standing on the rock, formed his hands into

a speaking-trumpet, and shouted to her.

She jumped up, and ran to the edge of the plateau.

"Run down the valley, and bring the first man you meet here."

She obeyed him instantly, running fleetly but steadily, as so few women can run. On and on she sped, until, at a considerable distance beyond the bluff, she saw two men coming leisurely towards her on horseback. Then she stopped, to recover breath, to be intelligible when they should come up to her, which they did presently. She stepped out into the road, and told them that she had been sent to bring help to her husband, who had climbed the ravine, and required assistance, she did not know why. Then one of the two, a fine young fellow, who recognized the English lady he had seen in the town last night, set Miriam on his saddle, holding her with his strong arm, and strid-

ing along by the side of his horse, while the other galloped on to Lawrence's assistance.

When Miriam and her escort reached the plateau, the other man was already beside Daly, having tied his horse to a bush. Miriam begged the young man who had come with her to tie up his horse also, and join the other two. He obeyed her at once, and Miriam resumed her seat on the stones. Lawrence was not hurt, she knew that; she could wait patiently for anything more there was to know.

And now, straining her eyes in the direction of the three men, who had not much more than standing-room, and were obliged to move with evident caution on the surface of the rock, she saw them lie down, each in his turn, as her husband had done, and grope, as she supposed, into the crevice, as he had groped. Then they all stood upright and talked earnestly together for

awhile, after which they descended the face of the ravine, and the two men went direct to their horses, loosed them, mounted them, and, having gravely saluted her, rode away. Not till then did Lawrence approach her, with face so solemn that it awed her for a moment out of the power of speech.

"Come away, my love!" He raised her from her seat, and drew her hand within his arm.

"What is it, Lawrence? What did you find there?"

"A dreadful thing—a human skeleton! A man on whom the upper rock, no doubt, had fallen and crushed him to death, while he was digging there between the two, unconscious of the loosening action of the flood."

"Oh! Lawrence, how dreadful! What can you do?"

"Nothing. Those good fellows have gone

to the town to give notice of the discovery. I fear I must appear at the inquest, for I only can presumptively identify those dry bare bones."

"You! Who is it, then?"

"Deering—it must be he! The unhappy wretch lied to me, came hither to dig out the nugget, and this is his terrible fate."

"Oh! Lawrence, how awful! But how do you know?"

"Thus! We found this in a deep crevice behind the lower rock."

Lawrence Daly placed in his wife's shrinking hands *Walter's Pocket-book.*

THE END.

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